



Book 1

Individuals, lives and livings

Edited by Ole Peter Grell and Deborah Brunton

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Chapter 1 Early modern Europe: an introduction

Deborah Brunton

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- identify the fundamental features of the early modern period, which form the themes of this module
- understand the problems of defining the early modern period
- know how to use some of the key resources for this module: the set book, resources on the module website and Open University Library resources.

Introduction

Let's begin the study of early modern Europe with an account by Richard Pococke, an English visitor to Venice on Ascension Day (the Christian festival marking the day when Christ is believed to have ascended into heaven) in 1734. (Figure 1.1 shows the ceremony in 1730.) There are some unfamiliar words here. The Doge was the elected ruler of Venice, and the procurators were officials of the city. The Pope's nuncio was a diplomat sent from the Vatican. There is also a phrase in **Latin**, 'testimonium perpetui dominii', which is a misquotation of the ceremonial words *Desponsamus te, mare, in signum veri perpetuique domini* ('We wed thee, sea, in the sign of the true and everlasting Lord').

We saw the ceremony of the Doges marrying the sea one of the finest sights in the world. About 9 I saw the Doge at Mass in the chapel of the Palace with the Nobles, thence they went in procession to the Bucentaur or fine Galley, with flags displayed, the sword of state going after the Doge before the Procurators and head Nobles, the Popes Nuncio on the right of the Doge, and the Emperors Ambassador [...] on the left [...] the Doge went in to the Bucentaur [...] being sett off shes rowd by 44 oars, two fine large Galleys of the state row at some distance after, the boats of ambassadors keep near the stern and many thousand Gondolas all about, musick in several boats, the bells all ringing the ships firing as it passd by [...] thus they went above a mile to the Isle of St Nicolas where the army of the state were drawn up [...] the vessel turnd, and [the Doge] [...] threw the ring in to the sea making use of words to this purpose by this ring I marry the sea in testimonium perpetui dominii, on which all the Guns fird, and they returnd to St Nicolas and landing went in procession to the church where mass was celebrated solemnly by the Bishop calld the Patriarch of Venice.

(Quoted in Redford, 1996, pp. 60–1)

What was your response to reading this passage? It probably prompted many questions. How can you marry a city to the sea, and why would you want to? Why was this ceremony so significant that important people like ambassadors and thousands of Venetian citizens followed the procession?



Figure 1.1 Giovanni Antonio Canaletto, *Return of the Bucintoro on Ascension Day*, c.1730, oil on canvas, 182 x 259 cm. Aldo Crespi Collection, Milan, Italy. Photo: Aldo Crespi Collection/Bridgeman Images.

By the end of this module you should be able to answer at least some of these questions – not because we spend a lot of time studying festivals in Venice, but because we explore the fundamental aspects of life in early modern Europe, including the role of religion, the structure of society, the organisation of work and trade, and developments in knowledge and ideas. This gives you a set of tools to understand early modern life, including its apparently strange and dramatic public rituals.

This chapter aims to give you the foundations for your study. It asks some very basic questions – What do we mean by ‘early modern’? What was ‘Europe’ at this time? – and introduces you to the themes that run through the module that will help to structure your understanding. So, it’s time to leave Venice and the Doge’s barge, and turn to early modern Europe, its society and culture.

1.1 When was the early modern period?

The term ‘early modern’ is an example of periodisation: dividing the long expanse of past time into ages or periods. Periods can be defined in different ways. The reign of a monarch or family is one way: ‘Tudor England’ refers to the time when England was ruled by monarchs from the Tudor family. Historians also talk about particular chronological periods, such as ‘the Sixties’, referring to the decade of the 1960s – although, in fact, most historians would stretch this period to include the late 1950s and the first years of the 1970s. This slightly cavalier approach to dates reflects a key aspect of periodisation: each historical period has some fundamental features of society, culture, politics and ideas that give the time an underlying unity and set it apart from earlier and later times. Historians’ definition of ‘the Sixties’ reflects a set of important social and cultural features that do not fit neatly into the decade. This tension between finding a convenient set of defining dates and the underlying characteristic features was caricatured by the writer George Orwell (1903–1950) when he recalled his history lessons at school, where ‘in 1499, you were still in the Middle Ages, with knights in plate armour riding at one another with long lances, and then suddenly the clock struck 1500, and you were in something called the Renaissance’ (quoted in Black and MacRaild, 2000, p. 18).

So when does the early modern period begin and end? The beginning of the early modern and thus the end of the medieval period (also called the Middle Ages) is associated with a group of fundamental changes that occurred in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In the field of ideas, this time saw a rebirth of interest in the writings of scholars from ancient Greece and Rome and a new emphasis on the use of observation as the basis of knowledge. This series of developments, called the **Renaissance**, in turn led to new ideas such as the model of the solar system with the sun at the centre while the planets revolved around it, proposed by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543). The spread of these new ideas was aided by the development of printing using movable type, devised by Johannes Gutenberg (c.1398–1468) in the 1450s. There was also a significant change in the economy, with a decline in the number of people holding land under the **feudal system**. Instead of getting access to land in return for military service or unpaid labour, farmers paid rent in goods or money. In religion, the power of the **Catholic Church** was challenged through criticism of its theology and practices, which ultimately led to the emergence of new

Protestant churches. Finally, around the same time, Europeans discovered cultures beyond Europe; the best-known voyage was that led by Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) which began the colonisation of the Americas.

The end of the early modern period and the beginning of the modern is associated with two major developments. The **French Revolution**, a period of major political upheaval lasting from 1789 to 1799, threatened to overturn the traditional structure of society, where power was concentrated in the hands of the monarch, the nobles and the church. While the social order was not destroyed, the French Revolution did open the door to the creation of a new political culture in the nineteenth century, with the expectation that ordinary people had some representation in government. Around the same time, the old power sources for all forms of work – the muscle power of men, women and animals (mainly horses) – were gradually replaced by engines powered by steam. This allowed the creation of machines and the production of goods on a scale never before imagined. The **Industrial Revolution**, entailing the shift of production from households and small workshops to large factories, brought with it huge social changes, including the rapid growth of towns.

While historians generally agree that the fundamental change brought about by these events marked the boundaries of the early modern period, they differ on exactly which developments belong to the early modern. For example, this module uses 1780 as its end point, as the authors believe that the upheavals of the French and Industrial Revolutions belong in the modern period. But you may have noticed that your set book, *The European World 1500–1800*, opts for a slightly later end date and includes the beginnings of industrialisation, the establishment of political freedoms following the French Revolution and the expansion of mass communication as part of the early modern (Kümin, 2014, p. 2).

1.2 What do we mean by Europe?

Before we examine the characteristic features of the early modern period in Europe, we need to think about what we mean by ‘Europe’. It is difficult to know exactly where to draw the boundaries of the continent: while the northern, southern and western edges are defined by oceans and seas, there is no geographical feature that clearly marks the eastern boundary of Europe. However, just as we can define the dates of the early modern period by certain features, we can define Europe by certain common characteristics – a shared Christian faith (although there were significant numbers of both Jews and Muslims in Europe), and an intellectual tradition based on ideas from ancient Greece and Rome. As with defining the early modern period, historians have slightly different conceptions of the boundaries of early modern Europe. Some include Russia and eastern Europe, where people followed the Christian Orthodox faith. In this module we have chosen to focus on western Europe, and we make few references to Russia.

In the early modern period the continent of Europe was divided into states, as it is now. If you look at the map of Europe in 1500 on page 367 of your set book, some of the countries, such as France, will be familiar although their boundaries are different. Others, however, like the Holy Roman Empire, are probably unfamiliar to you.

Online session 1.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 1.1. This should take around 30 minutes.

1.3 What were the features of the early modern period?

As you read earlier, the beginning and end of the early modern period are marked by important changes in ideas, society, religion, economics and politics. But what about the period itself: what aspects of life and events characterise the time between 1500 and 1780?

Exercise 1.1

Jot down anything you know about the period 1500–1780: any events that happened or people who lived between these dates. You may have encountered early modern history in many ways: as part of formal study, through books you have read for your own interest, through visits to buildings from that period, or through history programmes on the radio or television. Then try to put these events and people under the headings of ideas, society, religion, economics and politics. Don't worry if nothing much comes to mind – just skip to the discussion.

This should take around 5–10 minutes.

Discussion

Everyone will have a different list of things. I've read a lot of books about early modern Europe while preparing materials for this module, but apart from that I've watched and read some material just out of interest. Over the last few months I've seen television programmes about the palace of Hampton Court and the lives of women in the eighteenth century. You may have seen something similar – Henry VIII (1491–1547, reigned 1509–1547) and Elizabeth I (1533–1603, reigned 1558–1603) are popular topics for television history. I've also heard a radio dramatisation of the diary of Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) that included an account of the Great Fire of London in 1666. A number of years ago I lived in Edinburgh, which has many buildings surviving from the early modern period, including the New Town, which was begun in the 1770s.

So, to summarise, I've come across materials that tell me something about early modern society through the lives of elite and ordinary people, something about politics through accounts of royal power, as

well as a depiction of a major event; and I have some knowledge of an early modern city.

What do historians identify as the important features?

How does your knowledge of early modern Europe compare with the accounts of the period given by historians?

The first thing to note is that historians' understanding of what characterises early modern Europe has changed over time. If you look at an old textbook, you will find that the early modern (as the name suggests) was seen as a forerunner of the modern period: a time of transition between the medieval and the modern. Historians looked for changes that foreshadowed important aspects of modern life, such as the rise of democracy, the tolerance of a range of religious beliefs and the movement of people from the countryside into towns (a process known as **urbanisation**). This approach has now been abandoned. The problem with reading history backwards – looking for the origins of later change – is that it gives a skewed picture which emphasises those features that are seen as important in modern life, but ignores other developments which might have been significant in the lives of early modern people. Historians now try to study the early modern as a period that was important in its own right, different from, but with some continuities with, both medieval and modern times.

The quickest way to gain a sense of what present-day historians see as the distinctive features of the early modern is to turn to recent textbooks. I don't expect you to read a textbook at this point – all we need is a quick overview, and the best way to get that is by using a technique called 'gutting' a book. This is an extremely useful skill. As an example, I'll look at Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks' *Early Modern Europe, 1450–1789*, a textbook which is used on many university courses. Looking at the contents pages (one of which is reproduced in Figure 1.2), I see she has chosen to split the period into two (1450–1600 and 1600–1789) but to use the same chapter titles in each half. These give a good sense of the areas of history that she thinks are important in the early modern. The subheadings give a more detailed sense of the important topics and events of the period. There is also an opening chapter which gives a starting point, but I'll leave that aside.

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Figure 1.2 Contents page for Wiesner-Hanks, Merry E. (2006) *Early Modern Europe, 1450–1789*, Cambridge University Press.

Professor Wiesner-Hanks identifies six key areas of study in the early modern; I've summarised the events or topics that come under each heading. Don't worry if there are some terms you don't understand – you'll learn about them during your studies.

- *Individuals*: stages of the life cycle – childhood, marriage and so on – family, health, society and self-expression (through diary writing).
- *Politics and power*: military power, government, styles of ruler – absolute and enlightened monarchs – explored in different countries.
- *Cultural and intellectual life*: education, art, music, literature, political theory, science, the Enlightenment.

- *Religious reform, consolidation and renewal*: the Reformation, religious wars, Protestant churches, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, witchcraft, church and state.
- *Economics and technology*: population growth, agriculture, manufacturing, banking, capitalism, industry, urban life, poverty.
- *Europe in the world*: exploration and colonies in Asia, Africa and the Americas.

This is just one book, and Wiesner-Hanks might have an unorthodox view of early modern Europe. To confirm our findings, we need to look at another textbook.

Exercise 1.2

Try 'gutting' your set book, Beat Kümin (ed.) *The European World 1500–1800*, by looking at the contents pages and drawing up a summary like the one above. Leave out the introductory chapter and the concluding chapter. Are there any significant differences between the books? Overall, are they different or similar?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

My summary looks like this.

- *Society and economy*: gender, family, rural society, urban society, economy, poverty.
- *Religion*: Reformation, Catholic Church, Jews, Muslims.
- *Culture*: Renaissance, print, science, Enlightenment, magic, popular cultures.
- *Politics*: government, church and state, royal courts, war, rebellion, revolution.

The areas that the two books cover are broadly similar. However, the set book puts society and economy into one section, so there are fewer topics listed. There is much more space given to economics and trade in Wiesner-Hanks' book; and where Wiesner-Hanks devotes a lot of time to individuals, the authors in *The European World* approach people as groups – rural and urban society, gender and 'marginals' (the poor and criminals). The topics listed in the chapters on religion, politics and culture are very similar.

Overall, the two books set out a broadly similar picture of the important features of early modern Europe.

Now we've looked at two textbooks we can be confident that we have a good picture of the important features of the early modern period. How does that compare with our knowledge of early modern history?

Exercise 1.3

Compare the picture presented in the textbooks and your knowledge of the early modern period (or the discussion in Exercise 1.1 of my knowledge gained from popular sources). Are they similar? How do they differ?

This should take 5–10 minutes.

Discussion

The information I acquired from popular history is very different from that presented in the textbooks. I didn't have any knowledge about religion or economics. I had gained some insights into the social hierarchy in early modern Britain and politics at royal courts. Overall, I would say that these sources gave some understanding of the important features of the early modern period, but it is very patchy. I'm not surprised: television and radio programmes focus on engaging events and spectacular settings.

Your response will be different, but I hope you have discovered that you know something about early modern Europe even at the start of this module.

1.4 Early modern Europe: our approach

By now you should have realised there are different accounts of the history of early modern Europe. While the two textbooks we looked at have a lot in common, there are still some differences in the topics the authors have chosen to cover. This variation isn't surprising. Every historian brings a slightly different expertise to their work. They focus their research on different areas of history such as those we've identified in the textbooks: political, economic, cultural or religious history. Each area makes use of a particular range of source materials. Economic historians tend to make greater use of numerical data than others, while cultural historians draw on a wide range of sources, from texts such as diaries or letters, to objects such as pottery or jewellery. Within each area historians specialise in the history of particular periods, areas or events. Even when writing a textbook where authors want to give students an overview of a period, their particular understanding will influence what they choose to include, what they skim over or treat in greater detail.

So, if every history is slightly different, what picture of early modern Europe is presented by the authors of this module? The approach used by the authors is that of social and cultural history. Social history, the study of which developed in the mid-twentieth century, is a broad field of study that explores the everyday life of people, both individuals and groups, elite and poor, and the relationships between them. It overlaps with cultural history, which explores how people in the past thought about themselves and their world. So a social historian looking at the Ascension Day ceremony in Venice might explore what type of people visited the event, or how the order in which participants marched in the procession reflected their social status. A cultural historian might focus on the elements of ritual – what functions were served by enacting a marriage between a city and the sea, or what the decoration of the Doge's barge was intended to convey. In the module you will also encounter other sub-fields of history that fit within these two broad categories. Demographic history, for example, uses numerical sources such as tax returns to analyse populations. Urban history, the history of medicine and gender history focus on particular places, knowledge and practices, and the social roles of men and women. Focusing on a particular approach inevitably means that some topics are left out. So in this module we don't deal in detail with the politics of royal courts, or diplomacy between rival powers, or military history.

Your set book, *The European World*, shares our social and cultural approach, but, as you might now expect, it focuses on a slightly different range of topics and uses different approaches to the same subjects. Consequently, we use the set book as a source of information that helps to set module materials into a broader context, or to give a different perspective on a topic, and so helps to deepen your understanding of early modern Europe.

1.5 Early modern Europe: themes

To help you navigate your way through the module we have structured it around five themes that capture key features of the early modern world. You will encounter them several times as you work through the module – for example, there is a chapter on religion in each of the three books. Within each theme, we explore changes and continuities. Having defined the early modern period by a series of changes occurring at its beginning and its end, it is tempting to think of it as a time of stability, but there were in fact momentous changes between 1500 and 1780.

Here is a quick introduction to these themes together with some basic information: together they provide a foundation for the more detailed material to come.

Society and social order

Early modern society was hierarchical. According to the French lawyer Charles Loyseau (1564–1627), the division of people into different ranks was crucial to social stability:

Because we cannot live together in equality of condition, it is necessary that some command and others obey ... Sovereign lords command all within their state, addressing their commands to the great; the great [address their commands] to the middling, the middling to the small, and the small to the people ... Thus by means of these multiple divisions and subdivisions, the several orders make up a general order, and the several Estates a state well ruled.

(Loyseau, [1610] 1987, p. 14)

Although society remained hierarchical throughout the early modern period, the structure of that hierarchy changed over time.

Exercise 1.4

Turn to Reading 1.1, Charles Loyseau, 'A treatise on orders', 1610, and Reading 1.2, Daniel Defoe, 'Orders of society', 1709, located at the end of the chapter. These are two definitions of the structure of society. The first is an extract from Loyseau's *Traité des ordres et simples dignités* ('Treatise on orders and plain dignities'); the other is from an article by Defoe (1660–1731), a novelist and social commentator, in an eighteenth-century newspaper.

Then answer the following questions:

- How many groups or orders do Loyseau and Defoe identify?
- What is the basis for their division of society?

This should take around 5–10 minutes.

Discussion

Loyseau describes three orders, based on their social function: the first estate, or clergy, who pray for the souls of the others; the second estate, the nobility, who protect the others from violence; and the third estate, or peasantry, who work to provide food for everyone. Defoe, however, identifies seven groups based on their relative wealth and hence their living conditions.

Loyseau's description of three orders – clergy, nobles and peasants – dates back to the medieval period. It oversimplifies the social order, as there were significant variations in wealth and status within each group. For example, the nobility ranged from monarchs, some of whom were extremely wealthy, with many castles and palaces, to minor nobles who owned only a small estate with a single large house. It also leaves out merchants, traders and manufacturers: groups which grew in numbers and importance over the early modern period (Figure 1.3). Defoe's description of seven gradations of wealth and status recognises this fragmentation of society, although most contemporary authors identified three groups: the elite, the middle or middling order (also often referred to as the middle sort, as seen in the extract from Defoe) and the poor.

Groups within early modern society are usually described as ranks, groups or orders, but not classes. 'Class' is the term used by historians working on the nineteenth century and refers to groups within industrial society, divided by their relationship to the means of production.

While nobles dominated the social elite in the sixteenth century, owning much of the land and wealth, by the eighteenth century they were joined in the social elite by wealthy merchants and bankers. Some merchants were much richer than the nobles; for instance the Fugger family in Germany earned huge amounts from their mines and lent vast sums of money to the nobility.



Figure 1.3 Gillis van Tilborgh, *A Noble Family Dining*, c.1665, oil on canvas, 81 x 101 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary. Photo: MFA, Budapest/Bridgeman Images. The image shows a wealthy Dutch family in their comfortable home, surrounded by valuable possessions.

In the seventeenth century a new ‘middling order’ emerged. This group was made up of people with a wide range of occupations, such as smaller merchants, tradesmen, shopkeepers and prosperous farmers. It is hard to define the boundaries of the middle order, but members were recognisable by a group of characteristics. Members of the order employed staff to help in their businesses and households. They owned or rented a comfortable property, and expected to eat and drink well. They were educated, had good manners, paid taxes, took on social responsibilities, such as contributing to charities to care for the poor, and filled many roles in local government.

Below the middle order came the poor: a large and diverse group. Most poor people worked at some unskilled occupation – as market traders, labourers or laundrywomen, for example – but that work might be irregular. When they had no work, they were reduced to begging for food or money. The poor lived in cramped and often squalid dwellings, ate simple food, and had little or no schooling and few resources. Certain types of people were more likely to end up poor, including the old, the young, unmarried mothers, and the sick or disabled, all of whom found it difficult to find regular employment or work that paid a good wage.

Society was also divided along gender lines. Early modern Europe was a **patriarchal** society, where men held greater power than women. Men dominated the worlds of trade and of politics, but women were far from powerless. As parents, they had power over their children. Wealthy women ran large households, and the wives of nobles looked after their husbands’ estates while they were away on business or at war. A number of queens ruled in their own right during the early modern period, including Elizabeth I of England and Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–1689, reigned 1632–1654).

Early modern society was distinguished by a greater measure of mobility up and down the social scale than in medieval times. Successful merchants could become immensely rich, but misfortune or mismanagement could result in bankruptcy. A hard-working **journeyman** might establish a successful business, invest wisely, and ensure that his sons went to university and his daughters married well. Many peasant farmers could lose their access to common land, and be forced to become labourers or move to towns in the hope of finding work.

This brief sketch raises many questions. If society was so deeply divided, what held it together? Did conflict break out between social groups? How were the poor treated in early modern society? How did the lives of men and women differ? You'll discover the answers as you work through the module.

Religion: Reformation and Counter-Reformation

Religion was one of the most important features of life in early modern Europe. The Christian faith was predominant, although there were also Jews and Muslims living in Europe. In 1500 the Catholic Church held enormous power and influence. Across most of the continent, the Pope and a hierarchy of archbishops, cardinals and bishops organised and supervised the work of local priests, who looked after the souls of the people living in a particular area or **parish**. Religious rituals marked the key events of life: the baptism of newborn children, marriage, and the last rites before death. People prayed to saints for help in times of trouble. The year was divided by religious festivals such as Christmas and Easter, and even dates in the farming calendar – when to plough, or sow, or harvest – often corresponded with days associated with particular saints.

However, the church was increasingly coming under attack from reformers, led by Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564). They argued against Catholic **theology** – the understanding of God and his relationship to the world. They also criticised church practices such as selling indulgences (promises that the purchaser would be let off some of the penalties of **purgatory**), arguing that there was no justification in the Bible for such actions. These debates struck at the most fundamental understanding of God, of the role of the church and of how people should live their lives.

The main points of difference between Luther and the Catholic Church were:

The source of truth about religion. Catholics had long accepted that the Pope and councils of the church were sources of religious truth. For Luther and other reformers, only the Bible, the word of God, was an authoritative statement of religious truth (the doctrine of *sola scriptura*).

The role of the church. For Catholics, the church was an essential mediator between God and man: celibate priests were special

intermediaries between God and ordinary people. For Luther, everyone was able to communicate with God. Clergy could help their congregations to live a godly life, but lived as ordinary people and were encouraged to marry and have children.

The sacraments. Sacraments are actions or ceremonies which mark particular points in individuals' lives. The Catholic Church recognised seven: baptism, confirmation, confession, communion, marriage, the priesthood and extreme unction (the last rites). Luther narrowed these down to just two: baptism and communion. Communion, when Christians communed (became one) with Christ, was also redefined. Catholics believed that priests literally turned the bread and wine used in the ritual into the body and blood of Christ, but reformers held a variety of opinions on whether the act involved an actual transformation or if it was symbolic.

Salvation. The question of how individuals could ensure that they spent the afterlife in heaven rather than hell was one of profound importance to early modern people. The Catholic Church taught that punishment in purgatory or hell awaited those who misbehaved or sinned while on earth, but that people could gain access to heaven through performing good works and following the ten commandments while alive. Luther rejected this, arguing that humans are innately sinful. Only God could grant humans access to the afterlife, which he did to those who believed: people were redeemed by faith alone (the doctrine referred to as *sola fide*).

Something of the contrast between Catholic and Protestant worship can be seen in Figures 1.4 and 1.5. The rich, beautiful image of the Virgin Mary and saints around the altarpiece was designed to encourage prayer (Figure 1.4), whereas the plain interior of the Calvinist church offered little to distract the attention of worshippers from the sermon (Figure 1.5).

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the split between the Catholic Church and reformers had grown too wide for reconciliation. The reformers – who were united in attacking the Catholic Church, but disagreed on significant points of theology – inspired the establishment of many reformed or Protestant churches (the term was derived from a letter of protest written in 1529 in support of Luther's teachings), including the Lutheran, Calvinist and Methodist churches. While the population of southern Europe remained predominantly Catholic, Protestant churches flourished in the north. The religious division, or



Figure 1.4 Francesco Mazzucchelli, *Our Lady of Rosary*, 1617, altarpiece; Giovan Battista Magistris, *Adoration of Magi*, 1675, altar antependium; Giovanni Cristoforo Storer, *Stories of Mary and Jesus*, 1646, frescoes. Certosa di Pavia monastery, Lombardy, Italy. Photo: Getty.



Figure 1.5 Isaak Nickelen, *Interior of St Bavo in Haarlem*, seventeenth century, oil on oak wood, 38 x 43 cm. Schlossmuseum, Schloss Friedenstein, Gotha, Germany. Photo: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg/Bridgeman Images.

Reformation, sparked conflicts, with hundreds of thousands dying for their faith in religious wars.

Luther and his fellow reformers had not set out to create a new church, but had sought to reform the Catholic Church. The popularity of Protestant ideas forced the Catholic Church to embark on a series of reforms, often called the **Counter-Reformation**, which addressed many of the criticisms launched by Luther. At the Council of Trent, a series of meetings held between 1545 and 1563, members of the Catholic hierarchy reaffirmed the fundamental points of their faith, ordered that priests should be better trained and thus better able to care for their congregations, standardised the mass (the form of church service – the text remained in use until the 1960s) and brought an end to corrupt practices such as selling indulgences.

The module explores these events in more detail, posing and answering many questions. How did these changes in religious belief and practice

affect the lives of ordinary people? How did religious upheavals impact on local government politics and on the relationship between states?

Online session 1.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 1.2. This should take around 2 hours.

Work and trade

Both the social order and religious beliefs went through fundamental change in the early modern period, but when we turn to work and trade, historians have described a balance between continuity and change. On the one hand, there were no major technological developments or wholesale changes in methods of production. Many eighteenth-century workers followed the same occupations and used the same techniques as their late medieval counterparts. On the other hand, the European economy grew considerably: to put it simply, more things were made, traded, bought and sold in 1780 than in 1500, largely as a result of a growth in population. This does not mean that everyone became wealthier, however. During periods of rapid population growth in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the increasing number of people produced a greater demand for food, clothing and so forth, and prices rose. But there were also more people looking for work, and, at the same time, wages declined. This left many of the poor struggling for survival, but created opportunities for new business enterprises too. Historians have also described a change in attitudes to work – an ‘industrious revolution’ – with people willing to work longer hours and more intensely in order to buy more goods.

How did these broad changes affect production? In early modern Europe, as in medieval times, the economy was dominated by agriculture. Between 80 and 90 per cent of the population lived in rural areas, and most (though not all) worked on the land. Men, women and children all laboured to produce foodstuffs (mainly grain, but also fruits and vegetables), fuel in the form of timber, and raw materials such as wool, flax (the fibre used to make linen) and leather.

Exercise 1.5

To get a more detailed picture of agriculture in Europe, and how it changed over time, you should read two extracts from your set book, both from chapters written by Steve Hindle. You may find these difficult to follow, as he uses a lot of technical terms. Use the glossary to help you, but don't worry if you don't understand some of the words. If you can grasp the overall meaning, you will be able to answer the questions.

Part A

Turn to Steve Hindle, 'Rural society' in the set book and read pages 48–52. Then answer the following questions:

- What picture of agriculture is presented here?
- How secure a living did it provide?

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

- The extract suggests that rural life was not the same for everyone. Different types of agriculture were practised in different areas, and many people worked in rural industries rather than on the land.
- Life was difficult – factors such as the weather could determine whether people lived well or starved.

Part B

Now turn to Steve Hindle, 'The early modern economy' in the set book and read the section on agriculture, from the last paragraph on page 80 ('The period 1500–1650 ...') to the end of the section on page 82. Then answer the following questions:

- How did farmers respond to the demand for more food?
- What did they do when the demand declined?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

- Hindle argues that farmers successfully responded to the increasing demand for food by introducing new agricultural practices (such as mixing pasturing and raising crops), by bringing more land into cultivation and by seeking out the cheapest sources of labour.
- Interestingly, farmers continued to innovate when population growth slowed and demand declined, by moving into more specialist forms

of agriculture and by farming larger fields, which allowed more efficient use of labour.

Clearly, farming was changing over time, although the picture that Hindle presents is one of gradual development through many small improvements in farming practices rather than any one fundamental innovation.

Processes of growth, specialisation and diversification also occurred in manufacturing – although change was slow and, for many people, work changed little over generations. The dominant feature of manufacturing in the early modern period was the small scale of production. Many of the goods used every day were made within households. Food was processed: grain was made into bread and beer, and milk into butter, while fish and meat were preserved for later use, either by the family or for sale. Simple items such as brooms, platters and baskets were made at home. Textile production had traditionally been carried out in the home, but in the early modern period, while women continued to process fibre into yarn at home (Figure 1.6), the more skilled aspects of clothing production – weaving cloth and making up cloth into garments – were passed to specialist weavers and tailors.

Textiles were an important part of the early modern economy, with demand for clothing growing steadily as more people expected to have clothes reflecting the latest fashions. Cloth was traded over large distances. Silk fabrics from Italy and woollen cloths made in England and the Netherlands were exported across Europe. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, household textile production was coordinated into larger-scale manufacture through the ‘putting-out system’ or **proto-industrialisation**. This system exploited the slack periods in the farming year, when workers had spare time that they could use in making cloth. Merchants bought raw wool or flax and sent out parcels of the material to a succession of workers who would in turn prepare the fibre, spin it, weave it into cloth and then dye the cloth. Merchants paid each worker for their contribution, according to the amount of yarn spun or cloth woven, and sold the finished cloth to recover their costs and make a profit. In some areas, proto-industries began to take over from agriculture, with families abandoning farming work and devoting all their time to manufacturing.



Figure 1.6 Pieter Nijs, *Woman Spinning*, 1652, oil on canvas, 59 x 61 cm. Dulwich Picture Gallery, London. Photo: © Dulwich Picture Gallery/ Bridgeman Images. Paintings of peasant women often showed them spinning at home, combining the work with other tasks such as looking after children, or simply chatting to neighbours and friends.

The manufacture of luxury goods, such as furniture, jewellery, elaborate ceramics and mirrors, required higher levels of skill. These goods were produced in towns, in the workshops of specialist craftsmen. The production of these goods was closely regulated by **guilds**, associations of workers engaged in the same trade, such as goldsmiths or furriers, who banded together to protect their collective interests. Guilds oversaw the training of **apprentices**, and regulated the number of new businesses that were set up in any location and the quality of goods offered for sale.

Later chapters explore change and continuity in the world of work in more detail. What were the patterns of work of ordinary people in early modern Europe? What sorts of goods did people want to buy?

Bodies, health and disease

Life was precarious in early modern Europe and often all too short. Between one-tenth and as many as a half of all children died before their tenth birthday. **Epidemic diseases** could devastate communities. A single plague outbreak in seventeenth-century Amsterdam killed up to one-sixth of the population; the same disease killed over four-fifths of the people of Santander in Spain (Kamen, 2000, p. 25). For much of the population, any illness that prevented them from working for even a short time meant a slide into poverty, while injuries such as broken limbs could result in permanent disability.

In early modern Europe, many people understood how their bodies functioned by using theories devised in ancient Greece and Rome by scholars such as Hippocrates (c.460 BCE–375 BCE) and Galen (129–199 CE). The important components of the body were thought to be four fluids, or **humours**: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. When these fluids were balanced, the body was healthy. When there was some form of imbalance – an excess of one or more fluid, or a blockage in their flow around the body – illness occurred. This could be caused by an inappropriate diet, environment or lifestyle. Although this idea seems very strange to us, it was based on observation: when ill the body often ejects fluids such as vomit or phlegm. Under the humoral system, this was interpreted as the body trying to heal itself by getting rid of bad or excess fluids.

What kinds of illnesses did people suffer in the early modern period?

Exercise 1.6

Look at this bill of **mortality** (a record of deaths) from London for one week in 1665 (Figure 1.7). What diseases do you recognise?

This should take around 5 minutes.

The Diseases and Casualties this Week.

A Bortive	3
Aged	19
Bleeding	1
Cancer	1
Childbed	7
Chrisomes	14
Consumption	83
Convulsion	31
Droptic	22
Drowned 3, two at St. Katharines Tower, and one at St. Magdalen Bermonsey	3
Executed	3
Feaver	48
Fistula	1
Flox and Small-pox	23
Flux	1
Found dead in the street at St. Peters in Cheapside	1

French-pox	1
Griping in the Guts	34
Jaundies	1
Imposthume	3
Infants	11
Kild at St. Martins in the fields	1
Kingsevil	1
Livergrown	1
Pallic	1
Plague	267
Rickets	9
Rising of the Lights	4
Scurvy	1
Shot with a Pistol at Saviours	1
Southwark	12
Spotted Feaver	11
Stillborn	3
Stopping of the Stomach	1
Strangury	14
Surfeit	32
Teeth	3
Thrush	1
Timpany	2
Tifick	1
Vomiting	3
Winde	4
Wormes	

Christned	Males	107
	Females	92
	In all	199

Buried	Males	331
	Females	353
	In all	684

Plague — 267

Increased in the Burials this Week — 69

Parishes clear of the Plague — 110 Parishes Infected — 20

*The Asize of Bread set forth by Order of the Lord Mayor and Courts of Aldermen,
A penny Wheaten Loaf to contain Nine Ounces and a half, and three
half-penny White Loaves the like weight.*

Figure 1.7 A page showing a weekly mortality bill, from *London's Dreadful Visitation, or, A Collection of All the Bills of Mortality for the Present Year Beginning the 27th of December 1664, and Ending the 19th of December 1665*. Published by Edwin Cotes, London, 1665. Photo: Wellcome Library, London.

Discussion

There are a few names here that you might recognise, including cancer, fever (spelled 'feaver'), smallpox, plague and scurvy. Some of the diseases listed, such as convulsions, 'griping in the guts' (stomach pains or cramps) or 'teeth', seem to be unlikely causes of death. Bills of mortality are a reminder of how difficult it can be to understand what went on in the past.

Of course, people also suffered from less serious complaints, such as coughs, colds and stomach upsets, and children caught infectious diseases such as measles.

To cure disease and restore the balance of humours, people adjusted their lifestyles, ensuring that they got enough sleep and exercise and avoided eating too much of one type of food. Medicines provided a more immediate means of adjusting the humoral balance by causing some form of evacuation from the body, and people readily swallowed purges (which caused diarrhoea) and emetics (which induced vomiting). Bloodletting was a popular cure, used for many ailments. Faced with epidemics, when many people fell ill at the same time, communities applied collective remedies, isolating infected people away from the healthy, using bonfires to purify the air and saying prayers to invoke divine help (Figure 1.8).

Patients employed a wide range of practitioners to help them manage their health. At one end of the scale were **physicians**, trained in medicine at universities, who diagnosed illness by carefully observing symptoms and prescribed appropriate treatments. They charged high fees and were used by wealthy patients. A wider range of people employed **surgeons**, who dealt with injuries and other problems with the exterior of the body, and **apothecaries**, who prepared and sold medicines. Both surgeons and apothecaries lacked the thorough knowledge of the body possessed by physicians: they were not supposed to diagnose or prescribe, but in practice many did. At the other end of the scale was a variety of practitioners who lacked formal training: quacks or charlatans who sold remedies and carried out simple operations like removing teeth; **midwives** who helped deliver babies; and neighbours, friends and relations who might give out advice or medicines.



Figure 1.8 Thomas Dekker, title page of plague pamphlet, *London 'A Rod for Run-aways'*, 1625. Published by H. W. Haggard, Harper, New York, 1929. Photo: Wellcome Library, London. This woodcut captures the horror of plague. It shows people in London dying in large numbers: coffins are scattered about. The figures on the right of the image are trying to leave the city but are pursued by Death (the skeleton figure) and are forced back by those living in the surrounding healthy areas.

As ever, this quick outline raises many questions for later study. Were different illnesses associated with different stages of the life cycle? What did people do during epidemics? Did understandings of the body change at all over time?

Knowledge and ideas

These four themes of society, religion, work and bodies are explored in Book 1 of the module. In Books 2 and 3 you will encounter another theme: knowledge and ideas. Two of the key events which defined the beginning of the early modern period were linked to ideas. The first was technological: the development of printing using type. Figure 1.9 shows an early printing press.



Figure 1.9 A mechanical printing press of the type designed by Johannes Gutenberg, c.1568, woodcut. Photo: Pictures From History/Bridgeman Images. The image shows the process of printing. In the background, two printers put type into frames to form the words. The man with two pads is putting ink on to the type. A fourth figure takes the printed page out of the press.

Exercise 1.7

Turn to Mark Knights and Angela McShane, 'From pen to print' in your set book and read the introduction and first section on pages 192–6. Try to answer the following questions:

- What was the impact of printing?
- Who read the new printed books?
- How do you think the introduction of print and greater levels of literacy affected religious and social life and the world of work?

The answer to the last question isn't in the extract – just try to work out an answer. Don't worry if you can't think of anything.

This should take around 25 minutes.

Discussion

- Ideas had been circulating in manuscript for centuries, but the printing press provided an additional means of reproducing texts in very large numbers. Books were produced in both cheap and expensive editions.
 - The production of cheap editions, coupled with the increasing numbers of people who were able to read, meant that people from across society were reading – the rich, the middling and even some working people had access to books and ideas.
 - My answer to the third question is that books would have had a big impact on religion, especially the Protestant religion, which emphasised reading the Bible. In terms of social life, print opened up reading as a form of leisure to many more people. In the world of work, being able to read and write would have helped communications and record keeping.
-

The development of printing allowed books and the ideas they contained to travel quickly over long distances and reach large numbers of people. But what ideas were being exchanged?

The other key event defining the beginning of the early modern period was a cultural movement associated with new ways of thinking: the Renaissance. This refers to the re-examination or rediscovery of texts from classical Greece and Rome. (Confusingly, the English term 'renaissance' comes from the French word for 'rebirth'; sometimes you

may find historians using the Italian word ‘*rinascimento*’ instead.) The term was coined by nineteenth-century historians, but scholars working in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did see themselves as making a break with the past. Petrarch (1304–1374), an Italian scholar and poet, was one of the first to think of his time as distinctively different from previous ages and to divide history into periods: the ancient world, the Middle Ages and his own, modern period. Renaissance scholars claimed to be rediscovering the knowledge of the ancient world, although in fact medieval scholars had worked on ancient texts. But Renaissance scholars were interested in different aspects of ancient scholarship, particularly rhetoric (the art of creating a persuasive argument) and languages. They produced new translations of and commentaries on Greek, Hebrew and Latin texts, developed new forms of education and new techniques in art, and placed a new emphasis on the use of observation as a basis for knowledge. Moreover, the retrieval and study of theological texts written by early scholars such as St Augustine (354–430 CE) helped to drive church reform. These ideas spread across Europe in the fifteenth century.

The Renaissance emphasis on observation and reason as the means of developing better understandings of the world underpinned further periods of new intellectual enquiry: the **Scientific Revolution** and the **Enlightenment**. From the sixteenth century onwards, scholars brought the new emphasis on observation to the study of mathematics, physics, astronomy and anatomy. For example, Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), professor of anatomy at Padua University, published *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (‘On the fabric of the human body’) in 1543 (Figure 1.10). Where medieval anatomy texts drew the human body in ways that fitted with **humoral theory**, Vesalius based his illustrations on observations made during the dissection of bodies. However, while Vesalius pointed out errors in older texts, he retained his belief in classical theories of how the body worked. Similarly, Copernicus revealed that ancient explanations of the movement of the planets, based on the idea that the earth was at the centre of the heavens, conflicted with actual observation. His book *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (‘On the revolutions of the heavenly spheres’), published in 1543, revolutionised astronomy by placing the sun at the centre of the solar system, but retained the circular orbits used by earlier scholars.

In the Enlightenment, beginning in the late seventeenth century, scholars expanded their field of study to cover biology, chemistry and the ‘science of man’, exploring how the mind worked and how people

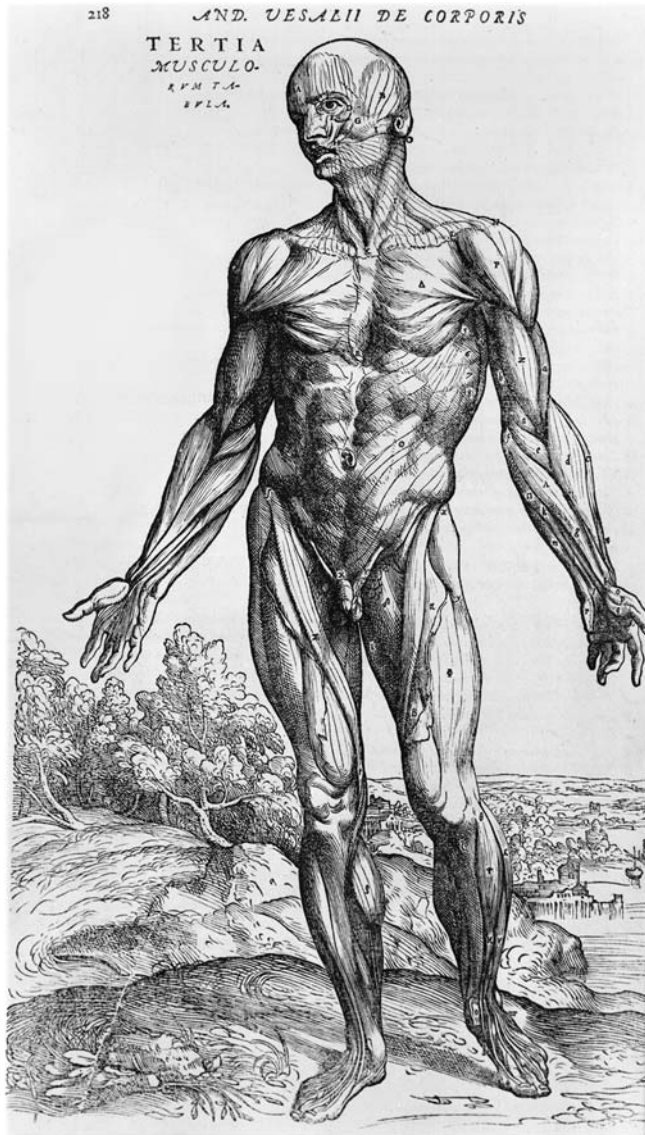


Figure 1.10 Anatomical study, illustration by Andreas Vesalius, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, 1543, engraving. Photo: Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Médecine, Paris, France/Archives Charmet/Bridgeman Images.

interacted in different societies. The overall goal of Enlightenment thinkers was the improvement of human life. Old sources of authority, including the church and the monarchy, were subjected to severe criticism and scholars attempted to create greater political freedoms through a new relationship between ‘enlightened’ rulers and the people.

1.6 Book 1: Individuals, lives and livings

Over the next nine weeks you will begin your study of early modern Europe by exploring the lives of individuals. We chose to open the module with this topic for a number of reasons. First, exploring the lives of people is an engaging pastime, as the popularity of the biographies of historical characters proves. Second, the lives of early modern people have been the subject of important debates among historians. In the nineteenth century the historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) identified the rise of the individual as one of the defining features of the Renaissance. According to Burckhardt, ‘In the Middle Ages ... man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation ... In Italy [of the Renaissance] ... man became a spiritual *individual*’ (quoted in Wiesner-Hanks, 2006, p. 52; original emphasis). Burckhardt’s views were challenged by other historians, and it is now accepted that groups continued to be important in the lives and identity of early modern people. However, Burckhardt’s conclusions helped to drive an examination of individuals and questions of identity: how people thought of themselves and how they presented themselves to others. The study of individual lives also raises interesting questions about agency. How much freedom did men and women have to direct the course of their lives? Were they free to choose who to marry, what occupation to follow, or whether to move to a new area? Or were these decisions determined by family interests or financial resources? Finally, the lives of individuals give us a route through which to explore broader aspects of history that can tell us a great deal about the important features of the early modern period identified earlier in this chapter.

To begin the exploration of individuals and identity, let’s look at a short passage taken from the evidence of an Italian woman in a Venetian law court in 1591:

My name is Orseta Frolade Santo, I come from the Friuli. My husband is named Batista Garzolo; I live in [the parish of] San Rocco in the campiello [a small square] next to the potter, and my occupation is to do piecework, to cook and to spin.

(Quoted in Chojnacka, 2001, p. 59)

What can we draw out of this very brief (but quite typical) account? Family is clearly important. Orseta is married; she gives her own family name (this was not unusual among early modern women) and her husband's name, but does not mention children. Her testimony also lists places and shows that she is mobile: she was born in Friuli (an area in north-east Italy) but lives in Venice. Work is also important to Orseta's identity and from it we can learn something about her social status. She names three jobs, all of which are unskilled. This suggests she was one of the many poor women in towns who picked up whatever work was available, rather than following an occupation that required special skills or capital.

Orseta's life can tell us something about society in sixteenth-century Venice, but it would be impossible to study the history of Europe by exploring the lives of individuals, because every life is different. To simplify the process, historians look at aggregations of individuals: those with similar social status, or following similar occupations. We can also use population statistics to learn about individuals and their life patterns – their likelihood of marrying and having children, and how long they might expect to live, for example.

Four of the chapters in Book 1 (Chapters 3, 6, 7 and 8) focus on the theme of society and social order. They address a range of questions. Chapter 3 ('Households, families and populations: counting the people of early modern Europe') explores some of the most fundamental issues of early modern people's lives. How big were early modern families? How long could people expect to live? How did the European population change over time? Chapters 6 ('Living in poverty and life on the margins') and 7 ('The European elite: nobility and gentry') look at people living at the opposite ends of the social scale – the poor and the rich – and examine how individuals acquired and lost social status, their contrasting lifestyles and their codes of behaviour. The final chapter ('A sense of self: individualism') tackles a more complex question: how did early modern people think of themselves? What picture of their lives is recorded in diaries, and how does that contrast with the image they presented to the public?

The other three chapters each address a different theme. Chapter 2 ('Popular Christianity and personal faith') explores the impact of religious faith on the everyday lives of people, in particular how the Reformation shaped family life. Chapter 4 ('Bodies, life cycles and illness') looks at the ways in which early modern people understood how their bodies, what caused disease, and the links between the

different stages of life and ill health. Chapter 5 ('Work and reward') explores how people made a living and how work fitted into other aspects of life. Although each chapter addresses one of our themes, as you read you will realise that some material fits more than one heading. Understanding the lives of the nobility helps us to explore early modern society, but nobles also worked by holding a variety of government posts. We might place the materials on understanding disease under the theme of bodies and health, but theories of how the body worked could also fit into knowledge and ideas.

Online session 1.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 1.3. This should take around 30 minutes.

Conclusion

I hope this chapter has whetted your appetite for the rest of the module by giving you a grounding in some of the features you'll study in much greater detail, and by raising some questions to make you think. It has also introduced you to some of the resources you'll use over the next few weeks. Like all periods of history, the story of early modern Europe is not straightforward. Radical changes, such as the development of new religious ideas, sit alongside fundamental continuities. Sometimes, as in the world of work, there is less change and greater continuity than we might expect. History is always complex and often surprising, and I hope you will enjoy the challenges of studying this module.

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Readings

Reading 1.1 Charles Loyseau, 'A treatise on orders', 1610

Source: Loyseau, C. ([1610] 1987) 'A Treatise on Orders and Plain Dignities', in Baker, K. M. (ed.) *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, University of Chicago Readings in Western Civilization, vol. 7, Chicago, IL and London, University of Chicago Press, p. 14.

Since the people is a body with several heads, it is divided by orders, Estates, or particular occupations. Some are dedicated particularly to the service of God, others to protecting the state by their arms, others to nourishing and maintaining it through peaceful occupations. These are our three orders or Estates General of France: the clergy, the nobility, and the Third Estate.

Reading 1.2 Daniel Defoe, 'Orders of society', 1709

Source: Defoe, D. ([1709] 1971) 'The Review, 25 June 1709', in Rudé, G. F. E. *Hanoverian London, 1714–1808*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, University of California Press, p. 37.

The *great*, who live profusely.

The *rich*, who live very plentifully.

The *middle sort*, who live well.

The *working trades*, who labour hard but feel no want.

The *country people*, farmers, &c., who fare indifferently.

The *poor*, that fare hard.

The *miserable*, that really pinch and suffer want.

Chapter 2 Popular Christianity and personal faith

Ole Peter Grell

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the significance of faith and Christianity for early modern individuals and households
- consider how and why historians have offered different explanations about the significance of Christianity in this period
- understand the changing role of marriage and the household following the Reformation
- understand the significance and success of the Reformation.

Introduction

Today, Christianity may seem of little relevance to the daily existence of many people in the western world. It is therefore difficult to imagine what it would have been like to live in a society where most if not all aspects of life were determined by religion, as was the case in the early modern period. However, as you will see, precisely what that meant has been a bone of contention among a couple of generations of historians. From the prescriptive literature written by theologians we know what people were supposed to believe, but we have little idea about what they actually believed. Can the silent majority be described as good Catholic Christians before the Reformation? And did the Reformation succeed in turning people into Protestants? These are two major questions I shall try to address in this chapter.

2.1 Late medieval Catholicism

By the start of the sixteenth century Catholicism had been the dominant religion and the Catholic Church the only church in western Europe for centuries, existing in relative harmony with the **Orthodox Church** from which it had split around 1054, and which exercised similar dominance over eastern Europe. One would therefore assume that by 1500 most people in western Europe were Catholics. However, because of the lack of descriptive sources it is difficult to determine what ordinary people – the laity – believed then. The early modern world was divided between the clergy and the laity, the latter wholly dependent for their salvation on the church and its personnel: the clergy. Even so, in the early sixteenth century most Catholic villagers probably differed little from their parish priests in both education and religious views.

Most early modern historians agree that the Catholic Church had been struggling at parish level for some time before it was confronted by the Protestant reformers in the 1520s. The church as an organisation had by then taken on many new, secondary tasks, often of an economic and financial nature, to the detriment of its primary obligation of providing spiritual services to its parishioners. In many parts of Europe decades of neglect and oversight had left parishes without resident priests, while others had only badly trained substitutes rather than qualified priests. Some historians have argued that this weakening of the Catholic Church had already resulted in a fall in church attendance by the late fifteenth century. Consequently, decades before the Reformation parishioners had begun searching for alternative paths to salvation. This in turn resulted in late medieval **lay** religiosity proving surprisingly dynamic in the generation before the Reformation, finding new forms of expression outside the established church. There was a growing focus on local rather than universal saints, and memberships of brotherhoods (so-called confraternities) grew. New lay brother- and sisterhoods were established through lay initiatives dedicated to prayer, religious and charitable work outside the control of the Catholic Church, such as the *Devotio Moderna* ('modern devotion') in the Netherlands.

The French historian Jean Delumeau, however, has argued that the beliefs of ordinary people in western Europe were more pagan than Christian before the Reformation, and that a period of so-called

‘christianisation’ set in only with the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation (Delumeau, 1977). This is now considered a fairly extreme view, to a large extent built on the views expressed by the then Catholic clerical elite who regularly used the term pagan to define the beliefs of ordinary people, including parish priests, when describing the religious situation on the ground. The fact remains, however, that by 1500 the great majority of people in Europe considered themselves to be Christians, even if their Catholic faith might have been questionable and difficult to define from a theological perspective.

The English historian John Bossy has elaborated this view of Catholicism at the parish level (Bossy, 1985). He considers late medieval Christianity to have been primarily a social phenomenon. Medieval parishioners, according to Bossy, constituted a community through their belief in Christ, Mary and the saints, which they affirmed through public rituals. It was a religion based on kinship and on the moral principles of peace and reconciliation. Bossy’s interpretation is seen by some historians as an idealised version of late medieval Catholicism. He is seen as having excluded important aspects of Catholicism prior to the Council of Trent (often called pre-**Tridentine**) from his interpretation. Bossy’s focus on the laity means that he does not consider the enclosed communities of monks and nuns (those in holy orders), whose separation from family and society the church considered particularly valuable to the Christian community and who constituted a highly important part of medieval Catholicism.

Exercise 2.1

Now turn to Beat Kümin and Peter Marshall, ‘Church and people at the close of the Middle Ages’ in the set book and read pages 91–8. What were the central elements of Catholicism at the parish level at the time leading up to the Reformation, according to Kümin and Marshall?

This should take around an hour.

Discussion

Kümin and Marshall focus on the religious demands which the church placed on the laity: knowledge of the basic prayers (such as the Our Father), the ten commandments and the creed, and the prominent role given to the avoidance of the seven deadly sins and the value added by the seven acts of mercy. They emphasise that parishioners were expected to attend church on Sundays and major feast days and to

receive the sacrament of the Eucharist (communion) during mass. They underline the proliferation of masses for the souls of the dead which had taken place in the century before the Reformation, financed and established by relatives and friends of the deceased to facilitate their quick journey through the flames of purgatory.

The authors acknowledge the difficulty historians have in assessing what ordinary people believed around 1500. They then discuss the religious and institutional context (in other words, what the Catholic Church wanted people to believe), describing the services and rituals available to the laity. Accordingly, we are provided with a description of what parishioners were supposed to believe and what services and ceremonies they might attend, but little or nothing about what they actually believed and did.

2.2 The Reformation

Undoubtedly many sixteenth-century Christians, possibly even a majority, were in the main comfortable with what the Catholic Church offered them. However, a significant number were evidently dissatisfied, otherwise there would have been no Reformation following Martin Luther's (1483–1546) publication of his 95 theses in 1517, including condemnation of the sale of indulgences (you read an outline of the Reformation in 'Early modern Europe: an introduction': Chapter 1). There is much to recommend the view of the French historian Lucien Febvre, who attributes the appetite for reform to the emergence of a different type of laity by the end of the Middle Ages. This new, predominantly urban, mercantile 'class' was, according to Febvre, better educated, widely travelled, more curious and less likely than its predecessors to take the world at face value. As a result, this influential group became increasingly impatient with the offerings of the Catholic Church and its clergy. Febvre's thesis helps to explain why the Reformation proved particularly popular in urban areas.

Exercise 2.2

Now return to Beat Kümin and Peter Marshall, 'Church and people at the close of the Middle Ages' in the set book and reread the last paragraphs on pages 95 and 98. To what extent does Kümin and Marshall's view correspond with that of Lucien Febvre?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

I would say they agree to a considerable extent. The small but influential group of Christians who sought a more personal and deeper spirituality, identified by Kümin and Marshall, would presumably have overlapped with the better-educated people within the cities in particular, who were the consumers of the growing number of books and pamphlets coming off the printing presses. This group does not appear to differ much from the new urban 'class' identified by Febvre. Furthermore, Kümin and Marshall go on to identify this group as a main driver for reform.

Unlike earlier critics of the church such as Jan Hus (1369–1415) and John Wycliff (1320–1384), Luther's criticism of the Catholic Church was fundamental: he claimed it had fallen away from true Christianity. He pointed out that salvation could be obtained only through the grace of God and the faith of the individual. The Catholic Church claimed to hold a monopoly on salvation through its rites and institutions, mediated through its celibate clerics who stood in a special relationship to God and his church. Only through pious and charitable undertakings for and through the church, known as good works, could the laity achieve salvation. Luther rejected this elaborate structure, arguing instead that Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) was all that was needed for faith and grace. Priests, monks and nuns were of no greater value to God than anyone else; they were no different from the laity. All Christians, according to Luther, were the same, belonging to the priesthood of all believers. In his pamphlet *On Monastic Vows* (1521) Luther stated that there was no biblical basis for the Catholic Church's claim that celibate life was superior to marriage. By rejecting clerical celibacy as a spiritually superior way of life which was particularly pleasing to God, the obvious next step for Luther and the Protestant reformers was to spell out what they considered the religious purpose of marriage and family life.

2.3 Marriage

Luther wrote extensively about marriage in a number of pamphlets dedicated to that subject. He also addressed the issue of marriage in several other writings. In his *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) Luther argued that the **sacramental theology** of the Catholic Church was an obstacle to, rather than a source of, grace and salvation. He emphasised that marriage did not belong among the sacraments of the Christian faith. Instead, Luther pointed out that marriage had existed since time began and was not specific to Christians alone; nor did the Bible provide any justification for defining it as a sacrament even if it upheld the sanctity of marriage. God's grace, according to Luther, could not be conveyed through marriage. Like his colleague Andreas Karlstadt (1486–1541), Luther, while rejecting celibacy and holy orders, upheld marriage as a much more worthy state because it fitted the way humans had been created by God, and preserved them from sin while serving to increase the number of the faithful through procreation.

Online session 2.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 2.1. This should take around 30 minutes.

A dramatic consequence of this new view of marriage was that Protestant ministers themselves began to marry. Among the first was Luther's Wittenberg colleague Karlstadt, who married in January 1522. Luther himself married the former nun Katharina von Bora (1499–1552) in June 1525 (see Figure 2.1) and by the end of that year all his associates in Wittenberg had married. According to evangelical propaganda from the 1520s, vast numbers of nuns and monks abandoned their orders and left their cloisters in order to marry, visibly enhancing the significance of the institution of marriage for the Reformation.

By the 1530s, when Protestants had begun establishing their own churches, marriage had become a contract involving the consent of parents, performed publicly in the presence of witnesses with the



Figure 2.1 A painting of Martin Luther and his wife Katharina von Bora in c.1526, a year after their marriage, from the workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder. Oil on panel. Each panel 23 x 16 cm. Sammlungen auf der Wartburg, Eisenach, Germany. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

participation of the community and a blessing added in church. Having rejected marriage as a sacrament, the Protestant reformers accepted the possibility of divorce and remarriage. In the Catholic Church, where marriage remained a sacrament, this continued to be impossible. Here divorce implied only that a couple no longer lived together or shared bed and board, not the dissolution of their marriage. Separated couples remained technically married without any chance of real divorce or remarriage.

Most Protestant churches allowed divorce and remarriage on five grounds: adultery, wilful abandonment, chronic impotence, life-threatening violence and wilful deceit. Among the Protestant reformers only Martin Bucer (1491–1551) in Strasbourg was prepared to argue that a marriage had failed when love and affection were no longer regularly shared and all conversation had stopped. Protestant marriage courts generally made strenuous efforts to reconcile estranged couples before they granted divorce. The possibility of divorce helped to change the nature of marriage in the sixteenth century, but it never became a common solution to marital problems.

In Denmark immediately after the Reformation and the introduction of a new Lutheran Church Order in 1537, it would appear that numerous people made use of the new possibility for divorce. In Malmö, a city of around 7,000 people by the first half of the sixteenth century, a number of divorce cases were heard by the city court in the years immediately after the Reformation, resulting in divorces being granted – some for chronic impotence and others for wilful abandonment. The city council also facilitated a number of reconciliations, as can be seen from Malmö Court's verdict in the case of Henrick Brabander, a skinner, on 27 February 1540:

On 27 February (1540) here in the town hall before the burgomasters, the Council and the King's sheriff was called Henrick Brabander, burgher here, who acknowledged and proclaimed that he was friendly and reconciled with his wife and her mother and friends, having attacked the former improperly with cuts and blows. For which he today promises on his honour, neck and life that he in future will deal with her in a Christian and reasonable manner as an honest Dane should do. Should she [his wife] merit punishment in future he should punish her in a Christian, good-natured and proper way as accepted among honest Danes. Should he act differently this case shall remain open together with the next and he will be punished for it according to his own oath.

(Kroman, 1965, p. 174; trans. Grell)

Unlike the divorce cases, none of the city's Lutheran ministers assisted the mayors and the council in this case, one of a number dealing with domestic violence, none of which resulted in divorce. It is noteworthy that Lutheran Malmö remained a patriarchal society where no one questioned a husband's right to punish his wife, but the city council put in clear conditions relating to what punishments were acceptable, threatening retribution for the husband if he repeated the 'cuts and blows' he had previously handed out. The fact that Brabander had managed to reconcile himself with his wife and family and friends evidently helped his case.

Exercise 2.3

Turn to Reading 2.1, 'Divorce verdict between Oluff Nielsen Wogenmand and his wife Anna Nielses daughter, 14 March 1539', located at the end of the chapter. On what grounds did the city council and its Lutheran preachers grant divorce?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

The city council granted Anna a divorce because of her husband's chronic impotence. The term is not used explicitly in the 'open letter', but is referred to only in a somewhat roundabout manner.

The verdict refers to 'the evangelical freedom and Christian judgement' when granting Anna a divorce, an allusion to the Danish Lutheran Church Order which had been introduced two years earlier.

According to the Danish Church Order, marriage and divorce were issues which now belonged solely to **secular** authority, something which Luther's colleague Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558) later emphasised in a letter to the new Lutheran superintendents/bishops in Denmark. It would appear that neither these superintendents nor the secular authorities were comfortable with the new system. In the case of the superintendents, this is demonstrated by Bugenhagen's need to write to them. In the case of the secular authorities in Malmø, it is demonstrated by the fact that the city council had its new evangelical preachers on board for divorce cases (as you saw in Reading 2.1). By 1542 cases concerning marriage/divorce had been transferred to the cathedral chapters working in collaboration with the local royal administrators. Evidently the need for religious guidance in such cases was still felt, despite the fact that they had been de-sacramentalised at the Reformation (Lausten, 1987, p. 167).

Popular views of women and marriage on the eve of the Reformation

Martin Luther was convinced that ‘the estate of marriage’ had fallen into disrepute by the early sixteenth century, a development which, according to him, had not been caused solely by the greater religious value the Catholic Church attached to celibacy and virginity.

Online session 2.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 2.2. This should take around 30 minutes.

There is no doubt that around the year 1500 the prevailing view was that women were inferior to men, who were supposed to be both spiritually and morally superior. Luther, in many ways typical of his age, shared this patriarchal view to some extent, as can be seen from his often-quoted statement at table with his students and co-reformers in Wittenberg, namely that women with their wide hips and narrow shoulders were designed by God to stay at home and look after the family. Luther, however, firmly rejected the dominant Aristotelian view of the age that women were botched males. According to Aristotle, nature inherently sought to generate males, but lack of heat or adverse climatic conditions could lead to the creation being imperfect, resulting in a female (Maclean, 1980, pp. 8–10). By contrast, according to Luther’s reading of the Book of Genesis women were no less perfect than men. Both were God’s creation, even if man was superior and woman was created as his helper (see Figure 2.2).

In recent years, many historians in the expanding field of the history of gender relations during the early modern period have come to regard the Reformation as having had a detrimental effect on the role and freedom of women. Historians generally agree that the social and economic trends of the later Middle Ages had gradually limited women’s roles outside the home in crafts and businesses, and these trends were, according to some gender historians, reinforced by the Reformation, which added religious justification to these developments by emphasising the importance of marriage, idealising ‘holy households’ and ‘holy families’, which placed women in subordinate



Figure 2.2 *Kein edler schatz ist auffder ert/Dann ein frums weib die her begert* [There is no Greater Prize on Earth than a devoted Wife who prizes her Honour], Erhard Schön, woodcut, 1533. Schlossmuseum, Gotha, Inv. No.: 40.5. Photo: Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library. This woodcut combines text and illustration, showing the wife whipping her husband while pointing out how difficult it is for beautiful young women to cope with cheap clothes, hunger and housekeeping; if the husband wants a pious wife he should stay at home and work, otherwise he will be forced to clean and sweep. The husband bewails his fate and warns those who marry before they have a trade-skill and money: his life is a misery and his wife has taken his purse, sword and codpiece. The young man to the right of the cart is watching with concern, but the young woman next to him assures him that if he is a man in all things, then she wants no such power over him. The female fool advises the young man against marriage and to find himself a concubine, while the old man warns him against such women.

roles at home under the patriarchal rule of their husbands (see Figure 2.3). In particular, Luther's view of the family has come to be seen by some feminist historians as the prototype of the unconditionally patriarchal and authoritarian household and the foundation for the emerging autocratic state (Roper, 1989).

This view of the Reformation as having had a negative effect on the role and position of women in society has, however, been challenged by a number of historians. The German social historian Heide Wunder



Figure 2.3 Heinrich Vogtherr the Elder, *The Taming of the Lion*, 1524, woodcut. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany, Kupferstichkabinett, 713-115. Photo: bpk/SMB/Volker-H. Schneider. This German woodcut combines text and illustration. The strength and self-respect of the husband, represented by the lion, affected everyone in the household. Wives were encouraged to humour their husbands and console them in their darkest hour, while children and servants were expected to jump at their command. Pastors never allowed the father of the house to forget that God watched and judged his every act. Everyone sought to tame the lion, at the same time making sure they did not overstep the mark and injure his pride.

has pointed out that the term ‘mere housewife’ is a recent derogatory term and would have had no meaning in the early modern period. She argues that the fact that women returned to the home in the sixteenth century did not necessarily entail any loss of self-worth, or hinder their creative and economic activities. In many cases it meant only a change of location for their activities, which bear no comparison with modern housewifery. Women were tasked with a host of different responsibilities, such as gardening, slaughtering, brewing, cooking, making clothes, educating children, keeping family records and being involved in the family business (Wunder, 1992, pp. 21, 23–4, 94–6, 107–11).

The American historian Steven Ozment has dismissed the views of feminist historians as anachronistic and rooted in twentieth-century egalitarianism. Instead Ozment claims that when the views of the

reformers, especially Luther, on marriage and women are properly considered ‘against the religious culture and domestic practice of the Middle Ages, they are seen to address issues of great relevance to the well-being of sixteenth-century women’ and their families (Ozment, 1993, p. 153). That Luther held a patriarchal view of society is to be expected, but what is noteworthy is its enlightened form which caused him to reject the Aristotelian view of women as botched males. Luther claimed that ‘Nothing is more delightful than the fellowship of a good spouse, nor is anything more bitter than the death of a good spouse. Next to it is the death of children on which I am experienced – how painful it is’ (Karant-Nunn and Wiesner-Hanks, 2003, p. 123), and conceded that in his household his wife Katharina was the dominant partner in all respects (Ozment, 1993, p. 160).

Despite what might seem fundamental changes to the role and significance of marriage among Protestants, it is probably true, as claimed by a number of historians, that marriage continued to be regulated along the traditional patriarchal norms of late medieval society, where issues of wealth and honour mattered as much as religious ideals (Harrington, 1995, pp. 225–6). Some historians have also argued that the radical changes to marriage introduced by the Reformation, rejecting it as a sacrament and making divorce and remarriage possible, had only limited effect because it became closely regulated by conservative magistrates who were determined to uphold the sanctity of marriage. Even so, the possibility of divorce and remarriage in itself represented a significant change, despite its sometimes limited practical consequences.

There is, however, general agreement among historians that the Reformation resulted in two new kinds of marriage which proved important for early modern society. First, with the emergence of the religious divisions in the sixteenth century the confessionally mixed, or bi-confessional, marriage became a reality. In other words, one spouse might be a Protestant and the other a Catholic, or they might belong to different Protestant denominations. Such mixed marriages were discouraged by the authorities across Europe, but this did not stop them from taking place. Contrary to what one might expect from a patriarchal society, it was not always the husband who determined which faith would be observed in the household. This is illustrated in section 2.6 by Alice Thornton’s concerns while contemplating marriage.

Second, because Protestant theology rejected Catholic doctrines on celibacy and holy orders, Protestant ministers were not only free to marry but encouraged to do so, thereby establishing households of their own. This meant that where the Reformation was introduced and where parishioners previously had been served by either a celibate Catholic priest or one living with his concubine, they now had a model Protestant household, more often than not consisting of the pastor, his wife and a number of children who served the local community as an exemplar of domestic Christianity.

2.4 The household

The household, of course, was not an early modern invention, but had deep medieval roots. Protestantism, however, defined the household in much more exact terms which profoundly shaped family life. The broad kinship networks, the spiritual confraternities and the links between the living and the dead that characterised the Catholic household were rejected. The context of the family changed, and when the Protestant clergy spoke of the household they referred to husband, wife, children and other dependants such as servants or apprentices, each of whom had specific responsibilities to God and society (see Figure 2.4). Luther saw an ascending chain of divine creation, flowing from the family governed by the *paterfamilias* (father of the family), to the state ruled by the *paterpoliticus* (head of state) and the church directed by the *patertheologicus* (head of the church). Both in the medieval Catholic Church and later in its post-Tridentine form, parents were responsible only for providing their children with a model of Christian virtue and for bringing them to church, whereas responsibility for teaching them Christian doctrine fell to the priests.

All the reformers attached immense importance to the household, with each family being regarded as a 'house church' (*Hauskirche*). They provided guidance for parishioners on how to maintain a godly household. Apart from the advice they gave in sermons and catechisms (books containing instruction in the basic principles of Christianity in the form of questions and answers), Protestant ministers also produced a steady stream of **homiletic tracts** and devotional publications throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, all detailing what was expected of the model Protestant household: bearing witness to God by avoiding sin, producing children and displaying domestic love, piety and faith. In his preface to *The Large Catechism* (1529), Martin Luther stated that

Therefore, it is the duty of every head of household at least once a week to examine the children and servants one after the other and ascertain that they know or have learned of [the catechism], and, if they do not know it, to keep them faithfully to it.

(Quoted in Kolb and Wengert, 2000, p. 283)



Figure 2.4 Jörg Pencz, *Table Manners*, 1534, woodcut. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany, Kupferstichkabinett, 638-7. Photo: bpk/Jörg P. Anders. This woodcut was originally designed to illustrate a poem by Hans Sachs on table manners, advising guests not to sit at the head of the table, which was reserved for the master of the house, to wait for grace before eating, to close their mouths while chewing and to avoid flirting.

Protestants, especially Lutherans, were encouraged to immerse their young children in catechetical and moral instruction as early as possible. They considered children below the age of 14 more receptive to such teaching. Johannes Brenz (1499–1570), the Lutheran reformer of Württemberg, and Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), Luther's collaborator, were among the first Protestants to point to the importance of having children educated in the tenets of Christianity. According to them, children should know the ten commandments and the apostles' creed (which contained the core statement of Christian belief), be able to recite the Lord's Prayer (which for Protestants became the prayer all Christians should know) and be able to identify the sacraments and their significance.

The actual religious teaching of young children in most cases fell to the mother. Protestant women came to dominate the domestic religious sphere, where they prayed and recited the catechism with children and

servants, attended sermons with household members and, if literate, read the Bible and devotional tracts to them (Wiesner, 1993, p. 189).

The significance of the household and its children to the reformers can be seen from the steady stream of catechisms for the young which were issued. The Lutheran minister and poet Erasmus Alberus (c.1500–1553) wrote a catechism for small children entitled *Ten Dialogues for Children Who Have Begun to Speak* (1550). In the dedication Alberus praised children as ‘the first Christians to die for Christ’ – a reference to King Herod’s slaughter of the innocents (see Figure 2.5).

Alberus had first put together his catechetical dialogues for his own children to help their religious and secular education, which in his opinion should begin as early as possible when they started to speak and demonstrated some understanding. The following dialogue had in the first instance been conducted between Alberus and his three-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Gertrude:

Alberus: Do you love Jesus?

Gertrude: Yes, father.

A: Who is the Lord Jesus?

G: God and Mary’s son.

A: How is his dear Mother called?

G: Mary.

A: Why do you love Jesus? What has he to make you love him?

G: He has shed his blood for me.

A: He has shed his blood for you?

G: Yes, father.

A: Could you be saved if he had not shed his blood for you?

G: Oh no!

A: What would then have happened?

G: We would all be damned.

A: We would all be damned?

G: Yes, father.

A: O Lord God, it would have been bad for us poor people, if the Lord had not shed his blood for us.

G: Had the child the Lord Jesus not been born, we would be lost altogether.

A: Do you thank the Lord Christ that he has shed his blood for you?

G: Yes, father.

A: How? Tell me, child.

G: I thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, that you have become my brother and saved me from all want through your holy death. I praise you eternally for your great goodness.

(Quoted in Ozment, 1983, pp. 170–1)

This somewhat basic and repetitive dialogue was of course aimed at small children and intended to instil in them the love of God and some basic Christian understanding. Whether such catechetical dialogues fulfilled Alberus' ambitious aims is another matter. He expected his dialogues to help children to become knowledgeable, devout and intrepid Christians. According to Alberus, 'The reason so few people today [1550] are God-fearing, is that they were not raised to reverence God during childhood' (quoted in Ozment, 1983, p. 171).

A large number of children born in the early modern period died in childhood. The Protestant reformers taught that death was not a problem for the true Christian. In the case of children dying, however, that proved a difficult position to maintain. Martin Luther was devastated when in 1542 his daughter Magdalene died when only 13 years old and his faith nearly failed him. He wrote to a friend that he knew that he should thank God that Magdalene was now 'free of the flesh and the devil', but was unable to do so. He grieved so deeply for his daughter that 'even the death of Christ ... is unable to take this away as it should'. Seeking to console himself after her funeral, Luther wrote that he had now gladly handed over Magdalene to God, but even so he added that 'in my human heart, I would gladly have kept her here with me' (quoted in Ozment, 1983, p. 167).

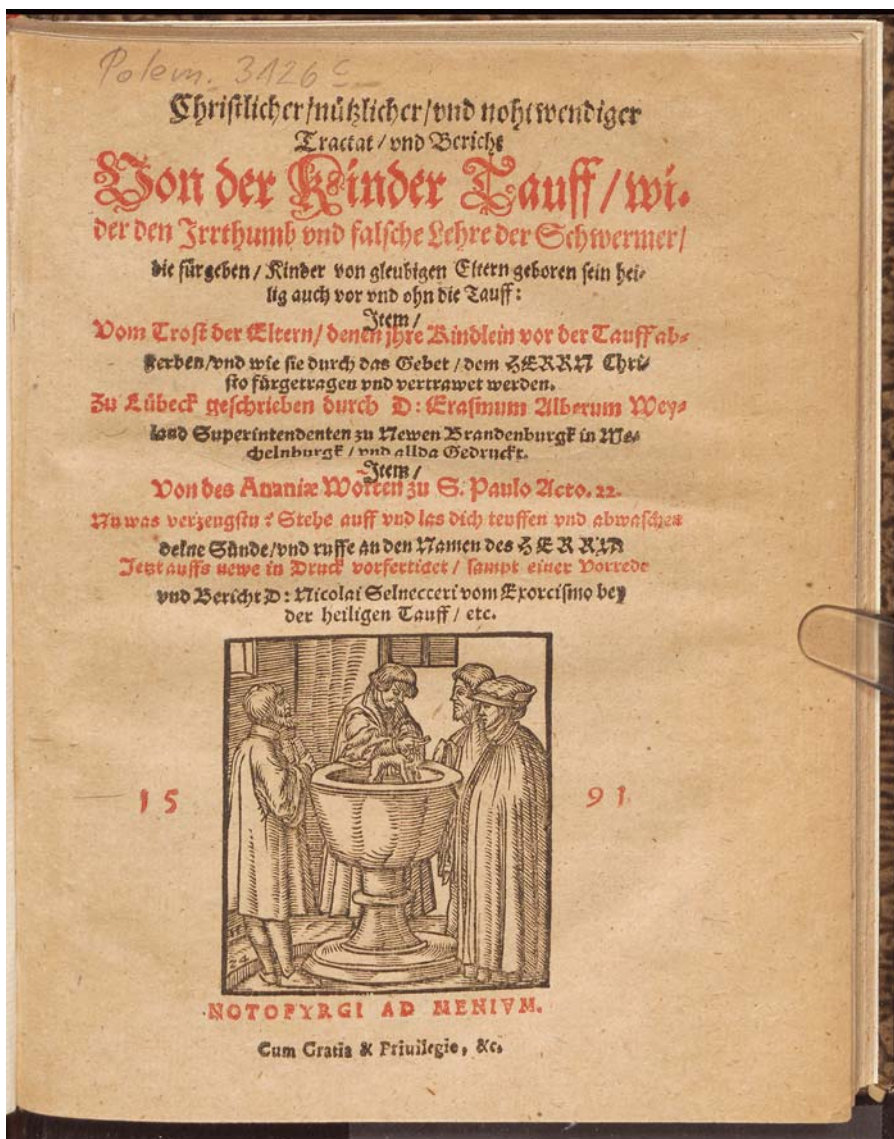


Figure 2.5 Frontispiece showing Erasmus Alberus performing a baptism, in *Christlicher nützlicher und nohtwendiger Tractat und Bericht Von der Kinder Tauff*, 1591. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Germany, Polem. 3126 c, title page. Photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München.

A Lutheran household in Nuremberg: the Paumgartners

The Nuremberg couple Balthasar Paumgartner (1551–1600) and Magdalena Behaim (1555–1642) left behind a collection of letters which offer us insight into the lives and faith of a Lutheran couple in the late sixteenth century. Nuremberg was one of the most important, free **imperial cities** in Germany and a major centre for European trade in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The city was situated at the junction of three major international trade routes: from Vienna to Antwerp, from Venice to Hamburg, and from Breslau to Geneva. It had been among the first of the imperial cities to support the Reformation wholeheartedly. By the second half of the sixteenth century it was a Lutheran city of around 45,000 people.

The Paumgartners married in 1583 and Magdalena gave birth to a son, Balthasar, the following year. He unfortunately turned out to be not just a sickly, short-lived child but also their only offspring. Paumgartner was a merchant who was often away from home, travelling widely. He traded in a variety of merchandise, from wine and cheese to Italian cloth such as linen, damask and velvet. He regularly attended the Frankfurt Fair and occasionally travelled to Lucca in Italy. When Paumgartner was on the road his wife Magdalena was in charge, acting as his representative and bookkeeper in Nuremberg, receiving goods and billing customers. Their letters offer detailed insight into the interdependency of a Lutheran merchant couple towards the end of the sixteenth century (Ozment, 1989).

Online session 2.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 2.3. This should take around 30 minutes.

2.5 Counter-Reformation Catholicism

For those who remained Catholics, however, the Reformation also had profound consequences.

Exercise 2.4

Now turn to Anne Gerritsen, Kevin Gould and Peter Marshall, 'The Long Reformation: Catholic' in the set book and read pages 123–7 and 131–2 to give you some background information on the Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation.

This should take around 20 minutes.

There is no discussion for this exercise.

By the 1540s it was evident that no reconciliation between the Protestant reformers and the Catholic Church was likely.

For the Catholic Church this meant a renewed focus on reform from within, while simultaneously creating new Catholic foundations such as (among others) the **Capuchins** and the **Jesuits**; and, of course, the calling of the Council of Trent which met in sessions between 1545 and 1563.

The Council of Trent provided a new set of guidelines and regulations for the church. The papacy increasingly enforced the regulation which obliged all bishops to reside within their dioceses. Similarly, the practice of bishops' visitations of local parishes, which had disappeared during the later Middle Ages, was reintroduced. The requirement was reinforced by Pope Sixtus V (1521–1590) in 1585 when detailed rules were laid down for such visitations. Visitors were supplied with elaborate questionnaires which caused them to inquire about the qualifications and personal lives of the local clergy, the number of people who took communion, and the number of parishioners attending mass as well as their willingness to contribute financially towards the church. Moreover, new seminaries for the education and training of the clergy were founded, as were new Jesuit colleges, which proved particularly important. Post-Tridentine (that is, after the Council of Trent) Catholicism strove to improve the quality of the clergy, from

bishop down to parish priest. Parochial conformity among the laity was encouraged, involving regular attendance at mass, confession of sins and receiving communion at least once a year at Easter. This new emphasis on discipline and behaviour served to change local religious observance from its traditional setting within family and kinship groups and to impose ecclesiastical control over previously autonomous village institutions, replacing a morality embedded in the **extended family** and locality with an individualistic Christian ethic tightly controlled by the church (Luebke, 1999, pp. 102–3).

The Catholic Church had shown little or no interest in catechising children before the Reformation, and the Council of Trent took the somewhat nebulous decision that the religious instruction of children formed an essential part of religious practice. Consequently, bishops told their parish priests to catechise the children in their locality after service on Sundays and feast days, while emphasising the duty of parents to make their children available for this. In the second half of the sixteenth century, inspired by the Protestant reformers, Jesuits such as Peter Canisius (1521–1597) and Roberto Bellarmino (1542–1621) wrote small books in the question-and-answer format to help Catholic children learn or memorise their catechism. However, this had to be done under direct clerical guidance and control. The leaders of the Counter-Reformation church remained deeply suspicious of household religion, which they considered a ‘seedbed of subversion’ that had to be discouraged and legislated against (Luebke, 1999, p. 103).

The renewed significance of the rosary

Traditional Catholic piety and lay institutions which had in the main operated outside the church’s control in the decades leading up to the Reformation, such as the rosary devotion and confraternity, were reformed, reinvigorated and brought under the church’s control after the Council of Trent. During the fifteenth century the rosary devotion had developed from a focus on the life of Christ which had included the repetition of the prayer known as Ave Maria, or Hail Mary, to a much more Marian-focused enterprise consisting of no less than 150 Hail Marys.

The rosary, of course, took its name from the string of beads used as counters by the praying person to keep track of the devotional repetitions of the Ave Maria, the Paternoster (Our Father) and the Gloria Patri (Glory be to the Father). The Hail Mary was to be prayed



Figure 2.6 Rosary, sixteenth-century, boxwood discs and jasper patenoster beads. A total of 50 boxwood discs are divided into five decades by five jasper balls. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, Germany, R 940. Photo: © Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München, Karl-Michael Vettters.

in groups of ten, matched by ten beads separated by a larger bead marking the recitation of the Our Father (see Figure 2.6). By the sixteenth century a pendant with an image of either Christ or the Virgin Mary was often added, from which hung five further beads and a crucifix. A praying person was supposed to pray at least five decades (five times ten prayers), known as a chaplet, in one session, whereas a complete rosary needed 15 decades – totalling 150 prayers, equal to the number of psalms in the Bible.

The rosary devotion proved a success from the outset among the laity as well as the clergy. The beads were tactile and easy to carry and often served decorative or even fashionable purposes as well (see Figure 2.7). Rosary confraternities were established across most of Europe during the fifteenth century. Members were advised to carry their rosaries in their hands, wear them on their belts or hang them around their necks. The prayers were easy to memorise and could be recited in either Latin or the **vernacular**, and the accompanying meditations could be performed by the illiterate as well as the literate. The devotion could be carried out within the local church, where the décor might assist the religious meditation which was supposed to be part of the prayers, or at home.



Figure 2.7 Bartholomäus Bruyn the Elder, *Helena Salsburg*, 1549, oil on panel, 97 x 70 cm (with frame), showing the subject holding her rosary. Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne, Germany, WRM 0253. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv, Köln. Apart from adding a tactile dimension to devotion, rosary beads were also seen as decorative jewels with an aesthetic function.

Exercise 2.5

Turn to Reading 2.2, Michael Nielsen, *Om Jomfru Marie Rosenkrands* ('About the Virgin Mary's rosary'), 1496, located at the end of the chapter. What purpose does the rosary serve, according to Nielsen?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Nielsen advises people to wear the rosary as an amulet to ward off evil, thus emphasising another dimension of the devotional uses of the rosary beads.

Beads could also be consecrated in church or kept next to an image of the Virgin Mary, thereby gaining greater power to ward off evil forces or protect against disease. The ability of rosary beads to cure was repeatedly mentioned in the published rosary manuals; this could be achieved by placing them round the neck of the sufferer. It was also not uncommon to sleep with the beads around the neck, retaining a link to the Virgin if one should be overtaken by death during sleep. Similarly, holding the rosary in one's hand in the hour of death was considered beneficial in terms of speeding one's soul through purgatory.

The popularity of the devotion is evidenced by the many rosary pamphlets which were published in the vernacular from the late fifteenth century onwards and by the number of rosary confraternities which came into existence: by 1482 more than 100,000 people across Europe had joined one. Unlike other confraternities, the rosary confraternity was open to all, men and women, and no fees were needed, which made them accessible for the poor.

The devotion to the Virgin Mary as expressed within the rosary confraternities was hugely important for Catholics in the decades leading up to the Reformation. This was a devotion which to a large extent had been outside the control of the church. It was later revived by Tridentine Catholicism in the second half of the sixteenth century in its efforts to graft orthodoxy onto popular spirituality. The rosary was reinterpreted and reinvigorated. Rosary confraternities became closely connected with the post-Tridentine focus on the devout life, be

it public and liturgical or private and meditative. It proved particularly popular among women: towards the end of the sixteenth century some Italian confraternities of the rosary had far more female members than men, such as the confraternity in the town of Legano which in 1589 had 561 female as opposed to 162 male members.

Not surprisingly, the public and liturgical aspects of the rosary were reinforced after Trent as a way of controlling and shaping lay, individual spirituality. Major political events such as the Ottoman navy's defeat by Christian forces at the Battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571) served to give the rosary prominence within early modern Catholicism. Pope Pius V (1504–1572) claimed that Christian victory had been obtained through the direct intervention of the Virgin Mary because members of the rosary confraternity in Rome had prayed for it. As a result, the day of the battle became the liturgical Feast of the Holy Rosary. Apart from emphasising the role and significance of the Virgin Mary and the confraternities of the rosary in promoting the wider agenda of the post-Tridentine church, this served to reinforce the link between praying the rosary and securing the Virgin Mary's help and assistance in dangerous situations.

The rosary confraternities, however, continued to serve as a large praying community who collectively provided insurance against the pain of purgatory. Furthermore, they were also able to draw on the special treasury of merits accumulated by the **Dominicans**, the confraternities' sponsors, not to mention the many rosary indulgences which had been granted them since 1476. Simply by taking up membership and praying the rosary, all this became accessible. Members had to meet only a weekly quota of prayers which would probably have taken no more than 45 minutes daily, but for others who tried to say a whole rosary psalter for themselves and family members a considerable investment of time would have been required.

In the second half of the sixteenth century the rosary confraternities downplayed the Marian aspects once more and refocused on Christ as teacher and a model for life. This theme was strongly promoted by the Jesuits, who used rosary meditations as a way of teaching Christian virtue while seeking to shape the lives of the faithful to that of Christ. Among individual lay Catholics, the post-Tridentine rosary confraternities continued to prove attractive to those who wanted to express their faith through repetitive prayer (Mitchell, 2009; Winston-Allen, 1997).

2.6 The diaries of Nehemiah Wallington and Alice Thornton

For Protestants, however, the ritual reciting of prayers remained a dubious, if not fraudulent religious practice, as did the idea that someone could access large numbers of collective credits to facilitate their salvation. As we have seen, Protestants relied exclusively on faith and grace for salvation; in many cases they grappled with their consciences, examining their lives in detail, deeply concerned about sins they had committed. Two examples from the seventeenth century illustrate this struggle.

Nehemiah Wallington

Exercise 2.6

Now turn to Peter Marshall, 'Religious culture in early modern Europe' in the set book and read the section 'New forms of piety' on pages 141–2 to get an understanding of **Puritan** religious culture .

This should take around 10 minutes.

There is no discussion for this exercise.

Nehemiah Wallington (1598–1658), a woodturner who spent all his life within the neighbourhood of the City of London, is a fairly extreme case of someone deeply concerned with living a godly life. As a Puritan, Wallington was far from unique among London **artisans** in his zealous godliness, but his extensive autobiographical writings set him apart. From the age of 20 until four years before his death Wallington managed to fill no less than 50 substantial notebooks. From 1632 he completed at least one notebook a year: an extraordinary output from a craftsman who spent long hours in his shop and regularly attended religious services throughout the week, not to mention the hours at home he spent praying. Wallington's primary concerns were religious; even political events were interpreted as evidence of God's plan for the world. He did not write solely for his own benefit, but also for his family and friends, and his notebooks had a considerable circulation.

Wallington came from a godly family. As a child and young adult, he prayed morning and evening, read daily from the Bible and attended church on Sundays as well as on weekdays. He appears to have had a religious awakening at the age of 20. He considered himself a lost sinner and constantly tempted by Satan. He hallucinated regularly and came close to committing suicide on a number of occasions. These experiences clearly inspired his autobiographical writings, which he considered to be a spiritual account of his life. By 1620 he had set himself up as a **freeman** of the Company of Turners, employing an apprentice and a journeyman. The following year he married Grace Rampaigne and moved to a new house, combining home and shop, just north of the old London Bridge. The couple had five children, only one of whom survived into adulthood. Apart from the children, at least one maid lived with the family, along with a number of journeymen and apprentices.

Despite his spiritual conflicts Wallington was convinced, as were other Puritans, that he belonged to God's chosen people, the Elect. Wallington was an active member of his local church and the wider godly community in London. He was a **Presbyterian**, but reluctant to take public office, proving apprehensive when he was elected an elder of the Fourth Presbyterian Classis in the Province of London in 1646 (Booy, 2007, pp. 1–28; Seaver, 1985).

Online session 2.4

Now go to the module website and complete online session 2.4. This should take around 30 minutes.

Wallington might have been inspired to regulate his household through daily Bible reading and prayer by his acquisition of the recently published book *Of Domesticall Duties, Eight Treatises* (1622), written by the prominent Puritan minister William Gouge (1575–1653), who had been a minister at St Anne Blackfriars, London since 1608. Gouge's work of no less than 339 pages proved extremely popular and went through numerous editions in the seventeenth century. Despite its size, it proved to be one of the most successful catechistical pastoral works for the household written in the Reformation period, not least because of its clear and didactic layout which could be easily consulted by the

reader. Most of Wallington's articles are drawn directly from Gouge's eight treatises: 1. Scriptural basis for domestic duties; 2. Of Husband and Wife, mutual duties between man and wife; 3. Of Wives' Particular Duties; 4. Of Husbands' Particular Duties; 5. Duties of Children; 6. Duties of Parents; 7. Duties of Servants; 8. Duties of Masters.

In 1625, when his daughter Elizabeth died suddenly shortly before her third birthday, Wallington was overwhelmed with grief and nearly lost his faith in a reaction similar to Luther's when his daughter Magdalene died. Only the stern advice of his wife brought Wallington to his senses. Wallington, of course, would have known the correct response to such a terrible loss or trial. It was described in much of the pastoral literature available in the period, such as the Puritan minister Richard Sibbes' *Devine Meditations and Holy Contemplations* (1638): 'God takes it unkindly if we weepe too much, and over-grieve for losse of wife, child, or friend ... for it is a signe wee fetch not that comfort from him, which we should and may doe' (quoted in Booy, 2007, p. 27). Such a response was fine in theory, but difficult to muster in real life.

Alice Thornton

Alice Thornton (1626–1707) was the daughter of Sir Christopher Wandesford (1592–1640), sometimes spelled Wandesforde (see Figure 2.8), a distant cousin of Sir Thomas Wentworth (1593–1641). In 1633 Sir Christopher left his home in Yorkshire for Ireland to join the administration of Wentworth, who had been made Lord Deputy of Ireland. Wandesford succeeded his cousin as Lord Deputy in 1640, but died a few months later. The subsequent Irish Rebellion of 1641 forced his widow and their five children to flee Ireland for their native Yorkshire. The chaos caused by the rebellion complicated the family's financial situation.

Alice, named after her mother, was the fifth of seven children born to the Wandesfords, of whom five survived childhood. The Wandesfords were a godly family, who remained within the Church of England. The family would gather three times a day for devotion, first at 6 in the morning, then again at 10, and finally at 9 in the evening. The children were educated at home under their mother's supervision. She gathered them every morning before breakfast to listen to their prayers and supervise their readings and expositions from the Bible. These sessions would then finish with the children kneeling in front of her receiving her blessing (Thornton, 1875, p. vii).



Figure 2.8 Attributed to George Perfect Harding after unknown artist, *Christopher Wandesforde*, early nineteenth century (after 1630), watercolour, feigned oval, 22.5 x 17.5 cm. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 2407. Photo: © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Alice married William Thornton when she was 25 years old, going on to give birth to no less than nine children, of whom only three survived childhood. When her husband died in 1668, she began an autobiography to remind her and her family of how God had guided her life through losses and grief. Her first short *Book of Remembrances*, like the later much expanded versions preserved in another three notebooks, was written exclusively for herself and her immediate family

with no wider circulation or publication in mind. All were intended to justify her life and actions.

Online session 2.5

Now go to the module website and complete online session 2.5. This should take around 30 minutes.

At the time of Thornton's proposal, it appears that Alice had other potential offers of marriage from wealthier suitors. It would also seem from later additions to her autobiography that her mother had belatedly raised some reservations about Thornton's financial circumstances, even if she clearly favoured his proposal. However, it was Alice's religious views and intent to marry a godly husband which would appear to have been the decisive factors. But before she accepted Thornton's offer she sought clarification of an important confessional issue. Being herself a member of the Church of England, even if belonging to the distinctly Protestant or reformed wing of the church, she was concerned about the Presbyterianism of Thornton's family. Thornton, however, was able to assure her that he shared her religious outlook as a member of the Church of England and guaranteed that their children would be brought up in the same faith.

2.7 Success or failure of the Reformation

In a similar vein to Jean Delumeau's doubts about whether late medieval Europe could be considered Christian, which I referred to at the start of this chapter, the American historian Gerald Strauss voiced his reservations in 1978 about whether the Lutheran Reformation succeeded in turning people Protestant. Strauss examined local archives and visitation records for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany for evidence of the success or failure of the Lutheran Reformation. He concluded that the Reformation had failed in altering religious perceptions among the majority of the laity. It had proved unable to filter down and change the beliefs and behaviour of ordinary German people. There was in his opinion little evidence to suggest that parishioners within Lutheran areas had become Protestants in any meaningful sense in the century after Protestant church orders had been introduced. Instead, Strauss emphasised the remarkable resolve and resistance of ordinary Germans to Protestant doctrines imposed from above. Strauss concluded that the common people often remained broadly Catholic in their religious outlook (Strauss, 1978, pp. 303–8). Where the Reformation succeeded, according to Strauss, it was rather due to draconian measures introduced by the state, not through catechisms, sermons and educational initiatives promoted by the reformers.

Strauss' conclusion rests on types of sources similar to those cited by Delumeau, in this case reflecting the expectations and disappointments of the Lutheran clerical elite of the period. Strauss' work gave rise to the so-called 'success or failure' debate about the Reformation, which saw other historians such as James Kittelson take issue with his views. In the case of Strasbourg, using the available visitation records for a quarter of a century after the Reformation, Kittelson concluded that the behaviour of people within and outside the city had indeed become deeply influenced by the Reformation. The young at least had grasped the fundamentals of their Lutheran faith and their catechisms. That change in belief and behaviour among ordinary people had proved much easier to achieve than Strauss had claimed. And finally Kittelson argued that the educational programme of the new Lutheran Church had proved far more successful than the coercive initiatives of government (Kittelson, 1982).

The seventeenth-century Lutheran Hans Mikkelsen (1578–1651), who became Bishop of Odense in Denmark in 1616, kept a diary from 1626 to 1641 where he made notes about his regular visitations in his diocese. He inspected not only all the parish churches but also the local schools to make sure that the children were well taught and knew their Lutheran catechism. As such, Mikkelsen's diary gives us some insight into the impact of Lutheranism a hundred years after the Reformation of Denmark, which took place in 1536.

Exercise 2.7

Turn to Reading 2.3, 'Four visitation entries from Bishop Hans Mikkelsen's diary, May 1631 to June 1632', located at the end of the chapter. After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- What was Mikkelsen looking for when visiting the schools and churches in his diocese?
- What do these entries tell us about the state of Lutheranism in Denmark a hundred years after the Reformation?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

- Mikkelsen was interested not only in the children's knowledge of the Lutheran catechism, which taught them the main tenets of the Lutheran faith, but also in their ability to read and write, not to mention their familiarity with Danish hymns.
 - The entries provide a mixed picture of successes and failures of Denmark's Lutheran Reformation within the parish setting.
-

It is clear from Mikkelsen's diary that he was a thoroughly dedicated bishop who felt deeply responsible for his diocese. This is reflected in his many visitations and the notes he made about them in his diary. Most of the notes about his examination of children's knowledge of their Lutheran faith and general learning are short, along the lines of 'children well taught', 'everything in good order', 'pupils badly taught'. Apart from expecting the children to be able to read and write, Mikkelsen wanted to make sure that they were familiar with Luther's *Small Catechism* (1529) and the main tenets of the Lutheran faith contained in it. This was, as implied in the visitation record of 22

June 1632 quoted in Reading 2.3 (“They knew their catechism, but could neither read nor write”), done through memorisation of the catechism which Luther had written specifically for the instruction of boys and girls. This way of teaching the basic principles of the Lutheran faith was typical for most if not all Lutheran areas in the centuries after the Reformation. The *Small Catechism*’s one-page-per-doctrine format made it particularly well suited to be cut up and stuck to a wall as an educational aid for memorising, and was most likely put together by Luther with that purpose in mind (Beutel, 2003, p. 17).

Like other post-Reformation Lutheran superintendents/bishops, Mikkelsen also attached considerable importance to pupils being familiar with the Danish hymns which had been introduced with the Reformation, many of which had been written by Luther himself. These hymns constituted an important part of Lutheran services, simultaneously reminding the parishioners of what the Lutheran faith was about and making them active participants in the services.

Apart from the value attached to education in general, the bishop’s focus on reading in particular obviously stemmed from Lutheranism’s emphasis on *sola scriptura*. It was essential for the individual to read the Bible for him- or herself and to his or her immediate family. All that, of course, depended on competent teachers – and Mikkelsen was well aware of this, as we can see in Reading 2.3 from his close interest in the ability and commitment of the teachers and parish clerks.

Mikkelsen’s diary shows us that by the early seventeenth century far from everything at the parish level was perfect from a Lutheran perspective, but progress was being made despite many local difficulties, not least due to the concern and care of bishops like Mikkelsen himself, who sought to encourage and assist where possible rather than simply finding fault with the many shortcomings he encountered.

Conclusion

So what are the answers to the two questions posed at the start of this chapter? With regard to the first, the majority of people living in Europe around 1500 were undoubtedly Christian; however, whether they could be described as firmly Catholic is more problematic. In a purely **dogmatic** sense they probably fell well short of what Catholic churchmen wanted, having little knowledge of the basic prayers and dogma, or of the importance of the seven deadly sins and the seven acts of mercy. Their Catholicism was most likely much closer to the social religious phenomenon described by John Bossy, where broad beliefs in Christ and the saints were collectively confirmed through the rituals of the church.

With regard to the second question, the Reformation would appear to have been fairly successful in turning most ordinary people into some sort of Protestants within the first generation in the areas where it was introduced. But, as with the first question, the answer becomes less clear-cut when more dogmatic criteria are applied. Many visitation records showed up shortcomings and failings, but bearing in mind the nature of these sources that should perhaps not surprise us – they were after all created to identify defects.

Protestantism, with its rejection of celibacy and holy orders, put the laity at the centre of its faith – unlike Catholicism. That served to make marriage, the family or the household the centre and starting point for Protestants who considered the family to be the foundation of the divine creation. Post-Tridentine Catholicism managed to improve clerical training and education, and ecclesiastical order and discipline, reinvigorating the church at parish level, founding new educational and missionary orders such as the Jesuits and emphasising the responsibility of parish priests to catechise the children within their communities. However, its deep-seated fear of the family and the household as a potential source of dangerous heresies guaranteed that the church did its best to discourage any lay religious undertakings which were not closely supervised by the church.

Consequently, we have very little direct evidence of what ordinary Catholics believed after the Council of Trent. We have nothing to match the evidence of Protestant households and families gathering for prayer and reading the Bible and devotional tracts to each other, or for that matter to match the evidence of individual Protestants' concern

about their salvation such as that displayed by Nehemiah Wallington. Instead we are left with devotions such as the rosary, which could be practised alone at home or in church, with its repetition of prayers that appear to have been extremely popular, but tell us relatively little about what ordinary Catholics believed.

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Readings

Reading 2.1 'Divorce verdict between Oluff Nielsen Wogenmand and his wife Anna Nielses daughter 14 March 1539'

Source: Kroman, E. (ed.) (1965) *Malmö Rådstueprotokol (Stadsbok) 1503–1548*, Copenhagen, p. 162, translated by Ole Peter Grell.

We the burgomasters and Council and the King's sheriff in Malmö proclaim with this our open letter of 14 March 1539 that before us in our city hall in the presence of the honest men, Mr Claues Morthensen, our Rector and Dean in Oxie district, Mr Hans Køge and Mr Hans Siundissen, preachers in this city, was called humble woman Anna Nielses daughter, our fellow citizen, and who had summoned before us Oluff Nielsen Wogenmand, her husband, accused and charged him how he had deceived her, because he is not a man whom any women would choose to seek bed with in accordance with nature as is natural, proper and suitable between husband and wife, asking for our judgement whether she because of this can be separated, free, disengaged from him and allowed to find another honest companion or not as the case may be. The above-mentioned Oluff responded by acknowledging and confessing that he suffered from such defect, but had hoped when he took the above-mentioned Anna to be his wife that he had been cured. And he gave the above-mentioned Anna a good, honest testimony, to the effect that she had acted as an upright, faithful Danish woman in all her actions as his wife and beseeched her for the sake of God to forgive him, if he had offended her in this way, which she then did. Then after accusation, response and confession it was agreed and permitted with the agreement and advice of our Rector and preachers that the above-mentioned Anna according to the evangelical freedom and Christian judgement is allowed to be separated, free, and disengaged from the above-mentioned Oluff Nielsen in every respect and be allowed to take another honest companion, if God will allow it and so intends. For further testimony we have added the seal of our city at the bottom of this our open letter.

Reading 2.2 Michael Nielsen, 'Om Jomfru Marie Rosenkrands (About the Virgin Mary's Rosary), 1496'

Source: Nielsen, M. (1997) 'Om Jomfru Marie Rosenkrands (About the Virgin Mary's Rosary), 1496', in Winston-Allen, A. *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages*, University Park, PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 116.

If you will keep the devil's wiles at bay
Then you should have this chain and wear it.
If you would not fall prey to the devil's tricks,
Never let it leave your side.
For if you wear it on your arm,
It will protect you from sin and harm.

Reading 2.3 'Four visitation entries from 1631 and 1632 from Bishop Hans Mikkelsen's diaries'

Source: Riising, A. and Seidelin, M. (eds) (1991) *Biskop Hans Mikkelsens dagbøger 1626–41*, Odense, University Press of Southern Denmark, pp. 72 and 90, translated by Ole Peter Grell.

12 May 1631: I visited the churches in Bregninge and Tanderup. The children were badly taught in both places; badly in Tanderup much worse in Bregninge. The ministers and the teachers/parish clerks were admonished to take greater care.

[p. 90]

22 June 1632: I visited the school in Rødby. There were around fifty pupils. They knew their catechism, but could neither read nor write, nor sing Danish hymns. The chaplain is responsible for their teaching which is done through an assistant.

23 June 1632: I visited Tågerup. The parish clerk, Peder Rasmussen, has started catechisation and lots of pupils from surrounding areas

have flocked to him and he teaches them reading, writing and arithmetic. I encouraged him in his undertakings.

24 June 1632: I visited the church in Vester Ulslev. The assistant demonstrated reasonable care, but I ordered him to teach the children twice a week, which he promised to do. This was then negotiated between him and the parish clerk who is totally deaf.

Chapter 3 Households, families and populations: counting the people of early modern Europe

Anne Laurence

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand how life events such as infant mortality, age of marriage, life expectancy, famine and epidemics determined the structure of the population in early modern Europe
- understand how early modern societies collected information about the population
- understand some of the ways in which historians present and work with numbers – in particular, how they count and measure past populations.

Introduction

The overwhelming fact of life in early modern Europe was the uncertainty of life's span: deaths of children – sometimes as many as a third of children died in their first year of life – and deaths of young adults in their twenties and thirties were common occurrences. This chapter is about trying to understand the scale of the differences between life in western Europe today and life in early modern Europe.

The focus of Book 1 is on individuals and small groups of people in early modern Europe so, on the face of it, looking at whole populations might seem to be out of place. However, we can study whole populations only by looking at the life events of individuals, even though the records do not allow us to know much more about them. By looking at many people together, we can see what might be typical or untypical of people's expectations and life experiences, so this chapter fits in to the module theme of society and social order.

The chapter has two main purposes. The first is to introduce you to the population of early modern Europe, including how many people there were, in what groups they lived, where they lived, how long they lived and how their families were organised. This will give you an understanding of some of the ways in which features of life taken for granted in Europe today were different in early modern Europe. The second purpose is to introduce you to some of the materials historians use as evidence to write about populations in the past and to look at how historians use these materials to explain developments in past times.

A range of different techniques and methodologies is used to uncover the history of populations (usually called **historical demography**). Populations generally change slowly, unless there is some kind of catastrophe such as epidemic disease, famine, mass migration, or a natural disaster such as an earthquake. The Black Death of the 1340s, for example, led to a dramatic decline in population numbers in western Europe: in some areas between a third and a half of the population died. But the epidemics of bubonic plague that afflicted England in the 1660s had only a relatively minor effect on the overall population level: the years of the highest death rates in seventeenth-century England were not those of the plague or the civil wars but those of poor harvests (Wrigley and Schofield, 1989, p. 322). Steve Hindle's chapter, 'Rural society' in the set book emphasises (p. 49) the

effect of periods of food shortages (mainly, in western Europe, signified by rises in the price of food, especially of grain) in population decline.

3.1 Households and families

This section is concerned with the characteristics of families and households in early modern Europe. One way to get to grips with this is to think about the ways in which families in early modern Europe differed from those of the developed world today. Before we turn to that I want briefly to consider the household and family in terms of their place in society. Social, legal, religious and political theorists regarded the family as the foundation of the state, believing that unruly families implied a society whose hierarchies were disordered. Their ideas were backed up by the institutions of both church and state.

Theologians (Protestant and Catholic), lawyers and kings concurred that the right ordering of society was hierarchical and that the family and state mirrored each other, both subservient to God. In 1536 the Protestant theologian John Calvin (1509–1564), commenting on the third commandment ‘honour thy father and thy mother’, noted that all authority derived from God and that

It ought not to be doubted that God here lays down a universal rule for our conduct; namely, that to every one, whom we know to be placed in authority over us by his appointment, we should render reverence, obedience, gratitude, and all the other services in our power. ... He has particularly enjoined reverence to our parents, who have brought us into this life; which nature itself ought to teach us. For those who violate the parental authority by contempt or rebellion, are not men, but monsters.

(Calvin, 1813, p. 360)

His views were echoed, though from rather different points of view, by such varied writers as the French philosopher and legal theorist Jean Bodin (1530–1596) and Louis XIV of France (1638–1715, reigned 1643–1715). Both likened the father’s authority to ‘sovereign authority’ (Mousnier, 1979, p. 86).

In the Middle Ages, England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales were separate states, each with its own government.

Over the early modern period, they gradually came together. Wales, which had been conquered by English kings in the medieval period, was formally incorporated into the Kingdom of England by Acts of Parliament in 1536 and 1542, under which it also adopted English law and began to send MPs to Westminster.

In 1541 Henry VIII (1491–1547, reigned England and Wales 1509–1547) was declared king of Ireland as well, although Ireland retained a separate parliament until 1801.

With the death of Elizabeth I (1533–1603, reigned 1558–1603), James VI of Scotland (1566–1625, reigned Scotland 1567–1625) became James I of England, Wales and Ireland too (reigned 1603–1625). Scotland retained its own parliament until 1707.

In addition to Scotland and Ireland retaining their own parliaments they also had their own currencies, set their own interest rates and levied their own customs dues on imports.

The term ‘Great Britain’ was used following the Act of Union between England and Scotland in 1707. The term ‘the United Kingdom’ came into widespread use only after the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland in 1801.

Exercise 3.1

Turn to Reading 3.1, *Families and households 2013*, a list of characteristics of the contemporary population of the United Kingdom provided by the Office for National Statistics for 2013, located at the end of the chapter. Then find Bernard Capp, ‘Gender and family’ in the set book and read pages 37–46.

Taking each point in Reading 3.1 in turn, work out how modern families and households compare with early modern families and households. You’ll need to read Capp’s chapter to look for specific points. Not all the sections of the chapter are relevant for this task, but cast your eye over them to make sure that you haven’t missed something important.

Although the author doesn’t explicitly say so, much of what he writes is drawn from the history of the family in England and Wales. He

sometimes refers to Catholic Europe as a shorthand term for Spain, Italy and Portugal, sometimes including France and southern Germany.

You may find that when you look at these figures your eyes glaze over because it's impossible to imagine what a million of anything looks like. That's why, alongside the numbers, percentages are provided too. These percentages allow us to do two things: first, to make comparisons with other times and places where the actual numbers may be very different; second, to understand what the likelihood of something happening might be.

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

- 1 Capp introduces the idea that an early modern family 'differed sharply from its modern equivalent' and often contained unrelated members (pp. 37, 42). He tells us (p. 42) that in northern Europe the **nuclear family** (parents and children) was the norm, while in Mediterranean regions larger and more complex families were more common.
- 2 The figures for the UK show that over the period 2003–13 the number of couples increased and that the average number of children in a family was typically fewer than two (the number of opposite-sex cohabiting family couples was 2.2 million and the number of dependent children living in such families was 1.9 million). For every family with one child, there were smaller numbers of families with two or more. Capp suggests that an average early modern family comprised between four and six children: those who survived the punishing levels of infant and child mortality (pp. 42, 43).
- 3 In both the modern UK and early modern Europe there were many households with one parent. As Capp points out (pp. 37, 43), the composition of the early modern family was unstable because of the likelihood of the early death of a parent. The implication of the statement that 'rarely did both husband and wife survive into old age' (p. 43) is that there were many young widows and widowers, often with young children.
- 4 In the UK in 2013, almost one-third of households consisted of one person. Capp points out (p. 42) that there were relatively high proportions of single people in early modern Europe. However, few of them could afford independent households. Many made their livings in domestic or farm **service**, which meant living as dependants in the houses of their employers (pp. 39–40).
- 5 In the modern UK there are few multi-family households. Capp notes (p. 42) that in the Mediterranean regions it was common to find

households of extended families, that is to say there were relatives in the household other than children and parents, or there was more than one parent and child group.

As you can see, there's no such thing as 'the early modern household' any more than there's a typical modern household. But when we look at the sum of many households we can see trends and developments that differentiate historical periods and differences between regions and nations. Let me now elaborate on some of these points.

What is a household?

The population of England in the early modern period was around 3 million in 1550, rising to 6 million in 1750. The growth was not constant: there was a slight dip in the 1690s (Wrigley and Schofield, 1989, pp. 575, 578). These figures cover England alone – not, as the modern figures do, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well. Historians have made various attempts to relate households to population numbers. The figure most commonly used for early modern England is 4–4.5 people per household.

The term 'family' now is normally understood to mean people related to each other by blood or marriage. But in early modern England the word was often used coterminously with 'household' (Capp uses the terms interchangeably and emphasises that many households contained people not related to the householders – servants or apprentices).

Servants and apprentices were commonly to be found, and not just in well-off households. The early modern household, as well as being the family home, was also a workplace. Servants carried out household duties and cared for children and the sick. They also performed tasks such as carrying water from the well, cleaning (if you depend on an open fire for all your cooking and heating, there is always ash and dust), caring for clothing and household textiles (often the most expensive possessions a family owned), and fetching, preserving and cooking food (with no refrigeration, food had to be used quickly or preserved). Figure 3.1 shows a prosperous family from the Netherlands saying grace before a meal. We can see parents and children and various unidentified family members. In addition, there seems to be a servant on the far right. It is relatively unusual for servants to be

shown in family portraits even though we know that many households, and not just those of the very rich, included servants. This servant may be shown because she was a particularly highly valued member of the household, or as an indication of the wealth of the householder. On farms, servants worked in agriculture and lived with the family that employed them. Apprentices living in the family home were sometimes learning a skilled trade; sometimes they were poor children who were sent to live with families to learn basic domestic and agricultural skills.



Figure 3.1 Anthuenis Claeissens, *A Family Saying Grace before a Meal*, c.1585, oil on panel, 97 x 142 cm. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford upon Avon, UK. Photo: Private Collection/Bridgeman Images.

Marriage and household structures

Households in northern Europe usually consisted of parents and children, and rarely of other family members. For example, in the Norfolk town of King's Lynn, which has unusually detailed poll tax returns for 1689, fewer than 2 per cent of households were complex households, that is to say households of individuals who didn't necessarily share a parent-child or husband-wife relationship (Cooper, 1992, p. 212). By contrast, in southern France it was common for parents to live with their married heir, his spouse and their children (Flandrin, 1979, p. 89).

In northern Europe (Britain, Denmark, Norway, northern France, the Netherlands, parts of Germany) a fresh household was formed when a newly married couple set up on their own. Marriage came late: couples deferred marriage until their mid-twenties, by which time both husband and wife had saved some money to help them set up a home. By contrast, in many Mediterranean, Alpine and Balkan regions newly married couples lived with the bridegroom's parents (Sarti, 2002, p. 43). In the Mediterranean regions in particular the age of marriage was rather earlier – often in the late teens or early twenties for women, although during the eighteenth century it tended to rise (McCaa, 1994, pp. 16–17). While the age difference between the bride and the groom in northern Europe was two to three years, in other places it was not unusual for there to be a difference of ten years. But, just to confuse matters, not all of these characteristics went together. For example, in Sicily, in southern Europe, the nuclear household was the norm (a pattern usually associated with northern Europe), but the age of marriage followed the southern norm, at around 18–20 years for women, while that for men was up to ten years more (Benigno, 1989, pp. 170–1).

I've suggested that the nuclear family was the usual family form in northern Europe and the extended family commoner in southern Europe. Both types of family, however, often contained step-parents and step-children. The reason for this was not, as it commonly is today, divorce or separation, but the death of a parent and the remarriage of the survivor. Remarriages of widows and widowers made up about a third of all marriages in England and Wales, though this proportion declined into the eighteenth century (Boulton, 1990, p. 324). Some historians associate this decline in remarriage with the rise in the ideal of the love match – the marriage of mutually attracted

couples, rather than a union undertaken for pragmatic social and economic reasons.

Marriage was for life, but short **life expectancy** meant that the average duration of early modern marriages among the poor in England was 17–19 years, rising to 22 years in the later eighteenth century. These periods were slightly longer for the gentry, chiefly because they married younger rather than because they lived longer. Only 20–25 per cent of marriages lasted for more than 35 years (Stone, 1979, p. 46). There was some geographical variation. Research suggests that marriages in Germany appear to have lasted longer (an average of 22–24 years), but this could be because that research involved a rural population (where people tended to live longer) and a slightly later period (Knodel, 1988, p. 158). In present-day England and Wales the Office for National Statistics tells us that even with 42 per cent of marriages ending in divorce, the average duration of marriage in 2012 was 32 years (Office for National Statistics, 2013a).

In early modern England there was little likelihood of both husband and wife surviving until all their children reached adulthood. Many widows and widowers were young women and men, and could end up with little to survive on (see Figure 3.2). So there were large numbers of lone parents, but the great difference between now and then is that the missing parent was almost always dead. There was effectively no divorce, and the remarriage of anyone with a living spouse was virtually impossible in England, Wales, Ireland and Catholic European countries (it was permitted, though not easy to achieve, in the Protestant territories of Scandinavia, Germany and Scotland). The commonest form of marital breakdown was abandonment. Especially among the very poor, one partner might simply disappear, throwing the other parent and children on the mercy of charity or relatives.

Unmarried couples with children were very unusual. Early modern church strictures against fornication (sex between unmarried people, or between an unmarried woman and a married man) and adultery (sex between a man and a married woman) could be enforced by either church courts or secular courts. In part, this was for pragmatic reasons to do with supporting a woman and a child rather than because sex was in itself immoral. In a poor society, raising money for people who couldn't support themselves was a serious matter. In the set book Capp (p. 42) notes that the law often treated women more severely than men where sexual transgressions were concerned. A reputation for sexual promiscuity could ruin a woman's chances of marriage and

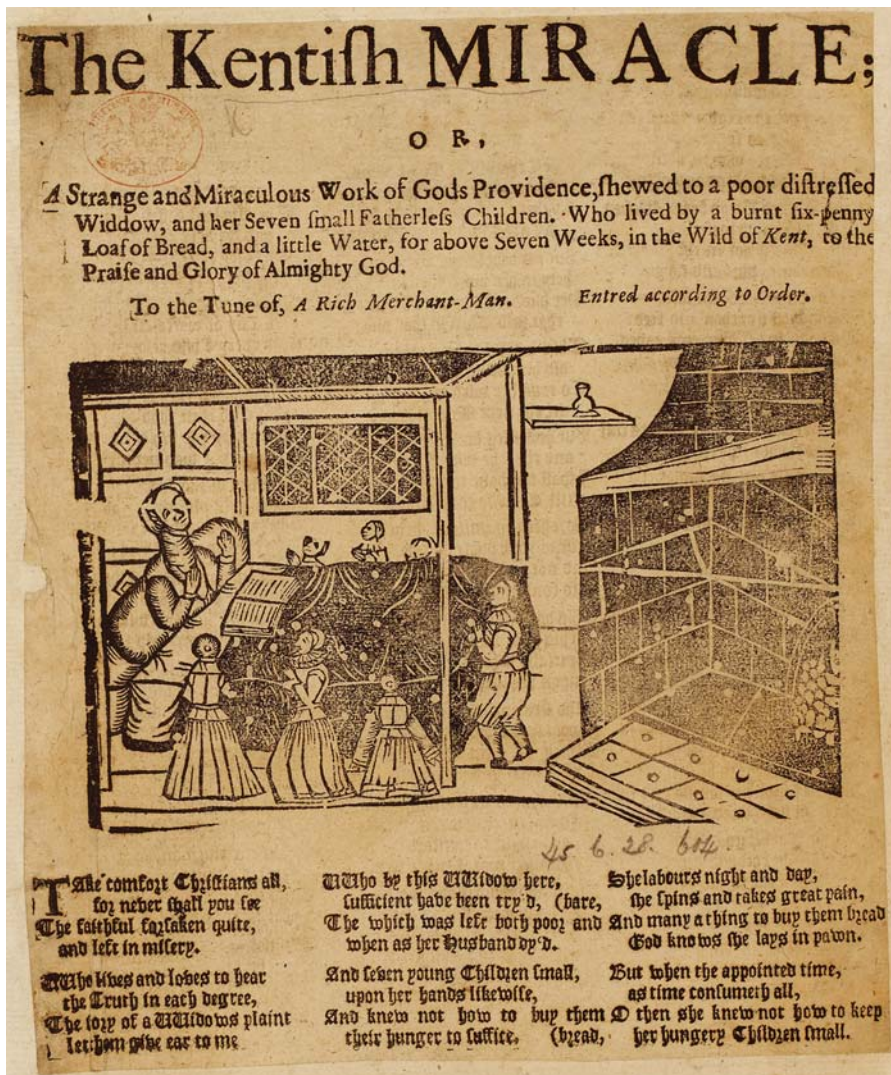


Figure 3.2 A rare depiction on a broadsheet ballad of 1684 of a non-elite family. What is remarked on is not the number of children (seven) but the poverty of their existence. *The Kentish Miracle or A Strange and Miraculous Work of Gods Providence*, printed for J. Deacon, at the Angel in Guilt-Spur-street without Newgate, London. Photo: British Library.

thus her survival. However, brides were often pregnant at the time of marriage. Pregnancy was not the *cause* of the marriage (as in the modern image of a 'traditional' shotgun wedding), but because the betrothal (when couples made a formal undertaking to marry) allowed them to begin to have sexual relations.

Marriage could be abbreviated abruptly by the death of either partner, possibly at a young age. The aristocratic women studied by Lawrence

Stone were four times more likely to die in the first ten years of marriage than were men, and were twice as likely to do so in the second ten years; thereafter the balance was in favour of women's survival. Deaths of young women were commonly related to pregnancy; those of young men to accidents associated with work. If a woman survived the most risky of her pregnancies (those at the beginning and end of her reproductive life), she had a reasonable chance of living into her sixties. However, there was a discernible increase in maternal mortality between the late sixteenth century and the late seventeenth century, and a decline in the eighteenth century. The reason for these changes has been much debated by historians, though they have yet to reach any definitive conclusions.

You might ask whether, since pregnancy was so plainly risky, people took steps to limit conception. It's clear that the contraceptive effect of breastfeeding gave rise to pregnancies spaced at two to three years, but it's also clear that parents wanted to have children. Families were highly valued, not least because they were an insurance policy for the parents' support when they could no longer work. As we shall see in section 3.2, although couples had large numbers of children, there was little likelihood of many of them surviving to adulthood.

One of the most striking differences between life in early modern and modern Europe was life expectancy. Women in early modern England tended to live longer than men, but the overall life expectancy at birth for men and women together ranged between just 32 and 40 years. Average life expectancy at birth in 2012 in England was 79 years for men and 83 years for women (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Nowadays infant deaths are mercifully rare, as are the deaths of people in their teens and twenties. We don't need the Office for National Statistics to tell us that there is now a considerable likelihood of many people living into their nineties, and in the developed world expectations are built around the certainty of long life and good health.

Exercise 3.2

Take a few minutes to review this section and jot down some notes to summarise the most important characteristics of early modern families, noting in particular differences between northern and southern Europe.

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

I would identify the following characteristics:

- Northern Europe: late age of marriage; two to three years' age difference between husband and wife; large numbers of children, but high infant mortality; few children born outside wedlock; marriages of short duration because of the high number of deaths of young adults; households commonly containing working people not related to the nuclear family.
 - Southern Europe: lower age of marriage; sometimes large age difference between husband and wife; large numbers of children, but high infant mortality; few children born outside wedlock; marriages of short duration because of the high number of deaths of young adults; households commonly containing family members beyond the nuclear family and less commonly people who were not related to the family.
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3.2 Children

In this section we will concentrate on children in early modern Europe, in particular looking at another feature that starkly differentiates early modern families from modern ones: infant and child mortality.

Children were very likely to die in their first year of life, and there was a further considerable rate of mortality between the ages of one and five years. If you survived those years, and the risks of pregnancy and work, you had a reasonable chance of living into your sixties and beyond. You've seen that early modern families in northern Europe typically consisted of four to six children. In the context of an average age of marriage in the mid-twenties and birth intervals of two to three years, this means that many parents had to endure the deaths of their children. In the following exercise you will look at the actual numbers. Why do they matter? They indicate the scale of infant and child mortality and the wide extent of the experience. While in modern Britain many people will pass their entire adult lives without knowing anyone who has lost a child, in early modern Europe most families you knew would have experienced the death of young children. So understanding this gives us an important insight into people's feelings, beliefs and choices.

Online session 3.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 3.1. This should take around an hour and a half.

You have just seen how frequently parents had to endure the loss of children at an early age, and how a family's expectations might be altered by the sudden deaths of young children. Not surprisingly, the impact of deaths on the quality of family relationships has attracted the interest of historians.

The influential historian Lawrence Stone has argued in a number of works, but particularly in *Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*, first published in 1977, that relationships within the family, shaped by the universal experience of early death, were less loving

before the mid-eighteenth century. At that point there was a discernible change in the emotional quality of family relationships, both those between husbands and wives and those between parents and children. Stone parodies marriage vows when he sums up his ideas: ‘Thou shalt not assume the ubiquity in the past of modern emotional patterns – neither premarital love, nor conjugal affection, nor maternal devotion to infants’ (Stone, 1985, p. 21). Among the evidence which he uses is the corporal punishment imposed by husbands on wives and by parents on children, and the way in which many children were separated from their parents at a young age by being sent away as servants or apprentices.

The practice of sending children away from home had a long history. The early age at which children left home was not evidence of a lack of affection; rather, the family was part of a network of obligations in which children were as much participants as adults. Newborn children were sent to the countryside to **wet-nurses** (though, as we have seen in online session 3.1, this reduced their chances of survival). Poor families sent children away to be fed and clothed by someone else while working as domestic servants or apprentices. Children of richer families were often sent away to other households for education and as part of a system of noble **patronage**. But when children were sent away in their early years it was into another parent-like relationship.

Different sources from those used by Stone suggest alternative views. Parents’ reactions to the deaths of their children offer an insight into the quality of parent–child relationships. This description is by a woman speaking in 1650 (we don’t know her name, only her initials, ‘E.C.’):

Two yeares agoe I buried a Childe, which was a very great trouble to mee to part with, and then I was more fully convinced of sinne, which caused my burthen to be the greater, so that I could seldome have any other thoughts but of desperation.

(Powell, 1650, p. 26)

One might argue that E.C.’s faith increased the burden of her grief (though I read her desperation being about the child, not about the sin). Her sense of sin gave her an explanation for such an otherwise senseless event. The almost universal Christian practice of western Europe provided parents with an explanation (God’s will) for the

deaths of their children, and encouraged an attitude of resignation after the first overwhelming grief at their loss.

3.3 Historians and the population of Europe c.1550–c.1750

The modern figures we looked at earlier were compiled from the UK government census taken every ten years and from annual household surveys. But early modern governments didn't collect data so systematically, nor did they have the means to extrapolate numbers from them on any scale. Nevertheless, historians can use the figures available to work out patterns in the features of populations.

In this section you'll analyse information presented in three different ways, in a map, a table and a graph, to study where people lived in Europe and how long they lived. All of the figures used to compile these have been derived through a process of working through registers and lists and making calculations (the development of computers for processing large data-sets has made this task vastly more manageable). These are not to test your mathematical capacities but to develop your skills in reading information presented in ways other than prose, and in a form that allows you to make comparisons between different places or times.

Where did people live?

Exercise 3.3

Look now at Figure 3.3, 'Population density in Europe in c.1600'. Where is the population most heavily concentrated?

This should take around 5–10 minutes.

Discussion

The first point to make is how varied the density of population is. The greatest concentrations of population occur in the south-east of England; in the south and east of Ireland; along the North Sea coast from the Netherlands down to south-western France; in northern Italy; round Paris, Rome, Venice, Naples and Vienna; and along the great continental rivers, the Rhine, the Rhône and the Danube. The central belt of Scotland was also fairly densely populated.

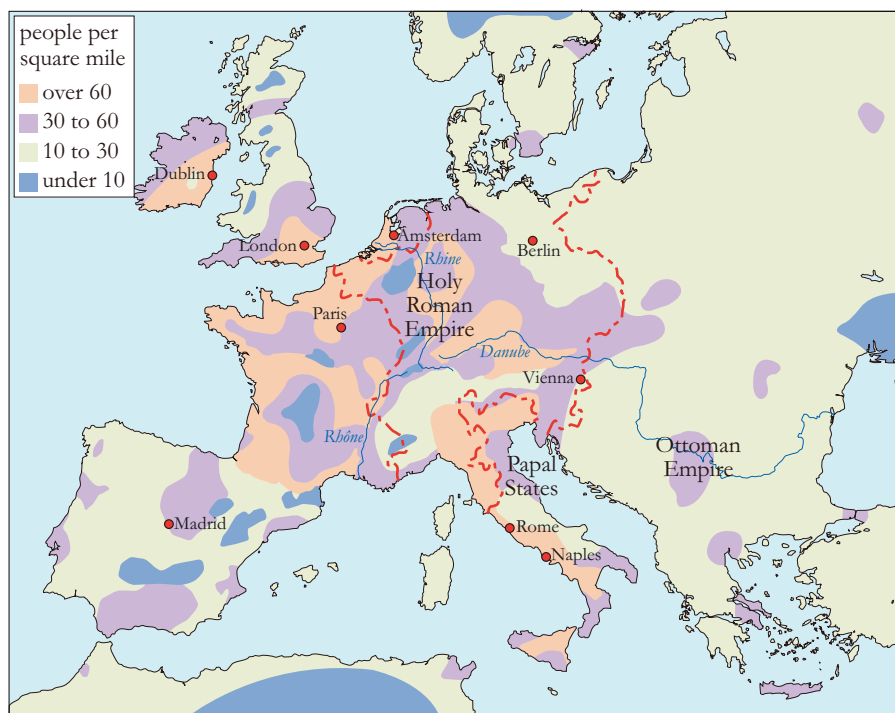


Figure 3.3 Population density in Europe in c.1600. Photo: Open University.

If you looked at a map of the population of Europe today, you would find that the areas with the greatest concentrations of people are much the same as in early modern Europe. However, the great difference is that while the densest population in 1600 was over 60 people per square mile, a modern map would show a density of over 400 people per square mile, almost seven times greater (a square mile is approximately 2.6 square kilometres).

Although a map like this is useful to convey at a glance how Europe looked, it also conceals a good deal. For example, although Scotland in 1600, as now, had its greatest concentration of population in the central belt, in the early modern period over half of that nation's population lived north of the Highland line which stretches some way north of the central belt. In the twenty-first century this is now the least populous region of Britain, with fewer than 25 people per square mile.

Exercise 3.4

Now turn to the set book and look at the map on page 59 (Figure II.3), which shows the location of large towns and cities at the start of the early modern period. Is there any correlation between the territories that are most densely populated (illustrated in Figure 3.3) and the largest cities?

This should take around 5–10 minutes.

Discussion

We can see from the two maps that the regions of greatest population density were not necessarily the most urbanised. The two coincide in the case of the **Low Countries** and northern Italy, but, for example, south-eastern Ireland, the Pyrenees and the central area between Vienna and Prague were all relatively densely populated but had few towns of any size.

Most of the largest settlements were on the coast or on a major river, making them commercial and communications hubs, and centres of government, religion and education. If you look at the size of the towns shown on the set book map, you will realise that by modern standards many of them were little more than large villages. Cities the size of modern metropolitan boroughs such as Birmingham and Manchester which typically have populations of over a million were unknown in early modern Europe.

Table 3.1 fills in some detail on the size and location of the cities with populations greater than 50,000. It reveals the uneven distribution of urbanisation. Italy had as many cities with populations exceeding 100,000 as the rest of Europe put together. London was by far the largest city in the British Isles (note that after London no English city had as many as 20,000 inhabitants) and the Holy Roman Empire had relatively few large cities.

Table 3.1 Urban populations c.1600 (Morris, 1998, p. 14)

	Over 100,000	50,000–100,000	20,000–50,000
Italy	Naples (280,000) Venice (148,000) Palermo (104,000) Rome (100,000) Messina (100,000)	Florence Milan Genoa Bologna Verona	Cremona, Lecce, Vicenza, Piacenza, Padua, Turin, Brescia, Ferrara, Mantua, Parma, Perugia, Taranto
Low Countries	Antwerp	Brussels Lille	Amsterdam, Utrecht, Leyden, Groningen, Haarlem, Maastricht, Ghent, Bruges, Douai, Valenciennes, Arras
The Empire		Hamburg Nuremberg Vienna Augsburg	Cologne, Bremen, Lübeck, Breslau, Magdeburg
Spain/Portugal	Seville Lisbon	Granada Valencia Madrid	Toledo, Barcelona, Valledolid, Segovia, Jaen, Salamanca, Cordoba, Burgos, Saragossa
France	Paris	Lyon	Rouen, Aix, Tours, Toulouse, Nantes, Marseilles, Orléans, Poitiers, Bourges, Dijon, Rennes, Amiens, Montpellier, Caen, Reims
England	London		

What does this mean in practice? By modern standards Europe was a pretty sparsely populated continent, with very few large cities in which only a minority of the population lived. In even the most urbanised and densely populated regions, such as the Netherlands, most people

lived in the countryside. Many people's lives were bounded by how far they could travel on foot. Other forms of transport were expensive and it was often easier to travel by water than overland. Members of families separated by long distances often simply lost touch with each other: postal services were expensive and slow and relied on senders and recipients being literate or finding a scribe.

Despite the difficulties of travel, migration for economic reasons was very common. Young men and women in northern Europe often left their homes for work either in towns or in other parts of the country, learning trades and gaining experience prior to marrying and setting up on their own. The populations of towns were sustained by migration from the countryside because the high level of urban mortality meant that few city populations even reproduced themselves.

How long did people live?

Now let us consider life expectancy. I noted in section 3.1 that life expectancy in early modern England was between 32 and 40 years. As you know from the figures on childhood mortality you studied in online session 3.1, the times at which people were most likely to die were not evenly spread through their lives, and varied between places.

The graphs in exercise 3.5 show comparative life expectancy over the early modern period for a variety of locations. As you would expect, if you calculate life expectancy at birth you get a lower figure than if you calculate life expectancy at the age of five, because of the very high mortality of infants in their first five years. There are two graphs because there are too many lines to make it easy to read all the data off one graph. The data for England is repeated between the two graphs to provide a common standard for comparison. However, we do not have statistics for the whole period for all the groups studied, which is why some of the lines are shorter than others.

Exercise 3.5

Study the graphs in Figure 3.4 and note the significant changes for the various groups shown: where each line of the graph rises or falls sharply, and the overall shape of the line. The year is given along the horizontal (x) axis. The vertical (y) axis shows the average number of years from birth that each population might expect to live for the given year. The data on the ages of British peers is from a study of members of the House of Lords, so it shows life expectancy for a group of elite

English and Welsh men up until 1707, and then for a group of elite English, Welsh and Scots men.

This should take around 10–15 minutes.

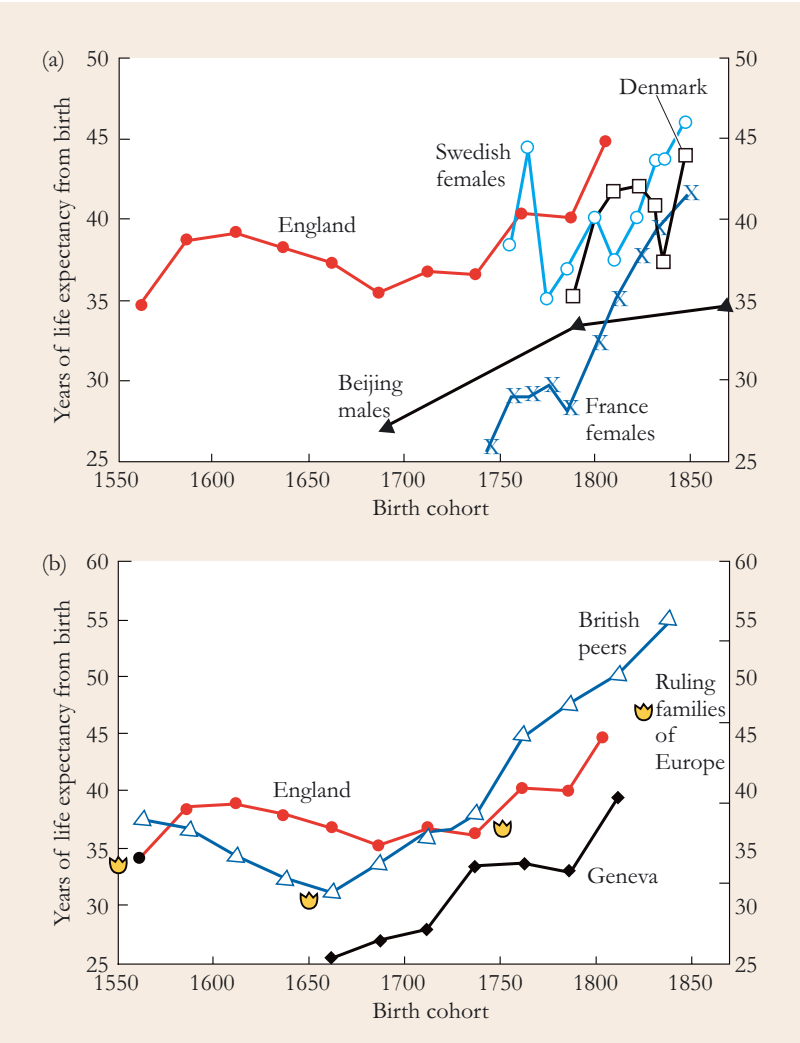


Figure 3.4 Life expectancy at birth, 1500–1850 (Hoffman et al., 2005, p. 137).

Discussion

Graph (a) shows that for Swedish women life expectancy increased and decreased sharply from the mid-eighteenth century, and for French women life expectancy increased sharply from the late eighteenth century. English men and women's life expectancy also increased from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. However, the increase wasn't a steady one: the figures fluctuate. Graph (b) shows similar rises for Geneva and the ruling families of Europe. The comparison between the overall population of England and British peers is interesting because it shows that before 1700 wealth and status (both of which we may assume British peers to have had) did not confer an advantage in terms of life expectancy. Neither better nutrition nor the efforts of the medical profession gave peers longer lives than English people generally until the eighteenth century.

As with the infant mortality figures in online session 3.1, the passage of time did not mean a steady improvement in life expectancy during the early modern period.

Studying populations

It must by now be apparent that large numbers of historians have devoted much time and energy to trying to reconstruct the populations of the past. Historical demography draws much of its methodology from the social sciences, applying advanced statistical techniques to data gathered from historical sources not only to measure but also to reconstruct speculatively populations where the historical data is incomplete. The founding father of this discipline was the French historian Louis Henry (1911–1991). Although there had been much work done earlier on populations in past times, Henry's contribution was to develop the conceptual framework of the subject and to apply it to pre-industrial populations. As with many historical advances, his work was, in part, prompted by concerns of the moment: he was studying the unexpected post-Second World War baby boom in France after a significant period of population decline earlier in the twentieth century (Rosental, 2003, pp. 5–6).

Henry's historical work could not have been done without the work of the historian of the Beauvais region, Pierre Goubert (1915–2012), who

had carried out relatively small-scale population studies using parish registers. Goubert was able to show that famine affected birth rates not merely because of early deaths but also because of lower rates of conception. The challenge for Henry was to extract large-scale data from parish registers: an enormous task for anything but a small regional study. His team lit on the idea of getting volunteers to extract figures from baptism, marriage and burial registers. In addition, the researchers began to reconstruct the life events of individual families, not an easy matter where people in different generations often carried the same names. The volunteers were mobilised in such numbers and the data was collected on such a large scale that Henry and his colleagues were able to generalise about the population and look at such matters as age at marriage, marital fertility and birth intervals.

Following on from Henry, historians began to look systematically at populations in other parts of Europe. In the 1960s a group of historians in Cambridge started not only to collect data from parish registers (using, as Henry had done, the services of volunteers to transcribe data for individual parishes), but also to develop techniques using computers to process what was rapidly becoming ‘big data’, with hundreds of thousands of entries. The large group of people who worked on the project produced dozens of articles on their findings in historical journals; the sum of the main findings appeared in E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield’s magisterial book, *The Population History of England 1541–1871: A Reconstruction*, published in 1981, with a revised edition in 1989.

The conclusions that Wrigley and Schofield drew have been widely accepted and have profoundly influenced our understanding of the early modern population of England. Their work was based on the study of the records of 404 English parishes to produce **aggregate population figures** for the whole country. They developed a model for projecting back from known populations to estimate earlier populations. The figures they produced for the whole country have provided benchmarks for more detailed studies. In 1997 a second volume (*English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580–1837*) appeared, in which they developed further Henry’s work reconstituting families. In effect Wrigley and Schofield reassembled the membership of hundreds of families from the parish registers of 29 English parishes, over the period 1580–1837, so as to establish patterns of marriage, mortality and fertility.

Population records

I want now briefly to discuss the kinds of sources these historians have used. As I've suggested already, early modern governments did not produce statistics in the way that modern governments and their agencies do. But early modern institutions were tireless recorders of all sorts of information about people.

The churches of most European countries kept registers of baptisms, marriages and burials and of people who made confessions (in Catholic countries) and who took communion. Since, for most of the early modern period, countries tended to be dominated by only one church – either Protestant or Catholic – the number of baptisms, church marriages and burials might be expected to have a reasonably close relationship with births, marriages and deaths. However, in most countries the registers, if they have survived at all, are rarely complete. While reconstructing populations from records of baptisms, church marriages and burials provides a proxy for births, marriages and deaths, significant groups of people are left out.

Central and local governments and churches levied taxes, which gave rise to tax registers, usually listings of householders liable for tax. Tithes, officially a levy on 10 per cent of the year's yields or profits, were raised to support the church everywhere and were legally enforceable. Very few direct taxes were paid by everyone. In England there was normally a lower threshold of wealth below which people were exempt from payment. In France the hereditary landed nobility were exempt from most taxes.

Few European countries had what we would think of as a census, but governments, both local and national, commissioned lists. One of the commonest forms comprised registers listing men liable for military service. In some countries musters of men were raised in time of emergency. However, there were substantial parts of Europe, especially to the east, where peasant tenancies might require military service as well as labour service. In regions of Germany where **serfdom** persisted (sometimes as late as the nineteenth century), registers of serfs were kept.

Court depositions (statements taken from individuals attending court to pursue a lawsuit or to provide testimony for some other purpose) also provide information about populations. They combine individual

stories with large numbers of testimonies from which historians can examine more generalised subjects.

Why do we need to use such sources, especially when they are at best partial? Why can't we just rely on the word of contemporaries? The answer is the same as the answer to why we need government statistics today: to fill out our personal knowledge. To return to the example of life expectancy, common sense teaches us that in twenty-first-century Europe many people live to a great age and centenarians are no longer the curiosity they once were. But we also know that life expectancy is not the same for everyone everywhere: it is lower in Scotland than in England, for example.

Changing populations

So far in this chapter and its online sessions you've learned about family structure, infant and child mortality and life expectancy in different groups and different places. In the last part of your work here you will read an article that draws all this material together, to create a picture of how and why population changed across Europe in the early modern period.

Online session 3.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 3.2. This should take around 2 hours.

The extracts you read in online session 3.2 (from Viazzo, 2001) give us a strong sense both of change over the period and of the differences between different parts of Europe. Pier Paolo Viazzo strikes a balance between the general and the particular. His description of the attrition of the population through warfare is important, but figures for war losses (both military and civilian) are notoriously difficult to establish. A case in point is the losses from the wars in Ireland in 1641–49. Estimates of the numbers of Protestants murdered in the first few months vary from tens to hundreds of thousands, and the subject is still a contentious one for historians. Viazzo's argument about the role of famine in population growth is also still the subject of debate. A recent article by two economists on the food shortages of the 1720s

discusses whether the famine led to the premature deaths of weaker members of the population, or had an adverse effect on the survivors' life expectancy and capacity to bear children. They conclude that the life expectancy of poor children born in England during the crisis years of 1727–30 who survived the famine was 12 years less than those born before and after the famine (Klemp and Weisdorf, 2012, pp. 233–4).

Conclusion

By now you may be wondering, given all the factors influencing population – birth rates, fertility, mortality – and the variations over time and in different geographical areas, if it is possible to make any definitive statements about population and the experience of early modern families and households. Some features do emerge very clearly. Throughout Europe, the early modern population was one characterised by high levels of births, but also high rates of death. The streets of an early modern town would have been full of young people, but there would have been very few elderly individuals. Death had an impact on family life: most parents would have grieved over the loss of at least one child. Levels of mortality also meant that there were many widows and widowers, who often remarried and created complex family units.

All these factors made early modern European households very different from their modern counterparts. The presence of servants who carried out domestic tasks or helped with agricultural and industrial work also makes early modern households seem strange to most Europeans today. Some aspects of early modern family life may be surprising: the high age of marriage in many areas and the acceptance that brides might be pregnant before marriage may challenge our expectations of life in the past. But other features are more familiar: in northern Europe, the nuclear family of parents and children was widespread in early modern times, just as it is nowadays. In many ways, it is the complexity and variation in patterns of life that make the study of families and households such an interesting topic.

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Readings

Reading 3.1 Families and households 2013

Source: Office for National Statistics (2013b) 'Families and households 2013' [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2013/stb-families.html> (Accessed 20 October 2015).

UK population in 2013

- 1 In 2013 there were 18.2 million families in the UK. Of these, 12.3 million (68 per cent) consisted of a married couple with or without children. A family is taken to be a cohabiting couple with or without children or a lone adult with children.
- 2 The number of opposite sex cohabiting couple families has increased significantly, from 2.2 million in 2003 to 2.9 million in 2013. The number of dependent children living in opposite sex cohabiting couple families rose from 1.4 million to 1.9 million over the same period. [The numbers of same-sex cohabiting families has increased as well; with the introduction of civil partnerships in 2006 they have become more visible.]
- 3 There were nearly 1.9 million lone parents with dependent children in the UK in 2013, a figure which has grown steadily but not significantly from 1.8 million in 2003. As a proportion of the total number of families with dependent children, lone parent families constitute 25 per cent. Ninety-one per cent of lone parents are women.
- 4 There were 26.4 million households in the UK in 2013. Of these, 29% consisted of only one person and 20% consisted of four or more people.
- 5 The fastest growing household type was households containing two or more families, increasing by 39% from 206,000 households in 2003 to 286,000 households in 2013. However multi-family households still only represent 1% of all households.

Chapter 4 Bodies, life cycles and illness

Helen King

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the early modern models of the body, health and the stages of life
- consider the main sources of knowledge about the body in this period, and the extent to which these changed or remained constant
- understand the different types of source material available, including learned and popular primary source material.

Introduction

I've not studied biology since I was 16, but I have some basic ideas about how my body works. As I get older, I seem to be on a learning curve as more things go wrong with it. I suppose I have picked up my knowledge not just from formal study but also from the media and from my visits to doctors and hospitals. There are some things I 'know' but which I could not explain in much detail; for example, that some diseases are caused by germs, and that my blood is being pumped around my body by my heart.

But how did people in early modern Europe think about their individual bodies, the nature of health and disease, and the way that their bodies changed across the life cycle? In this chapter you will be gaining an overview of beliefs about the body in the period we are studying, and you will be encouraged to think about how there were elements of both continuity and change here. You will explore the relationship between religion and science, while reading critically extracts from a range of different types of primary source material and gaining an awareness of the role of genre, the various categories of writing produced for different purposes and different audiences.

4.1 Humoral theory and the body of fluids

In this chapter you will begin the exploration of the body through an exceptional case: the **post-mortem** examination of an Italian woman who was a candidate for sainthood. Despite being so unusual, this case will help us to see what the expectations for normal individuals were.

Elena Duglioli (1472–1520) was a wealthy and influential woman in Bologna. She was deeply religious and may have commissioned the artist Raphael (1483–1520) to paint the altarpiece *The Ecstasy of St Cecilia* for a chapel in Bologna (Figure 4.1).

In a demonstration of the close links between spirituality and the body, Elena owned a piece of the body of St Cecilia – her knucklebone – as she was particularly devoted to this saint. One example of the overlap between religion and medicine in the early modern period was that such fragments of saints' bodies, known as relics, were believed to have healing powers.

Reading 4.1 draws on a *vita* (Latin for 'life'), written in the form of a biography detailing the life of a candidate for sainthood (canonisation). To be recognised as a saint by the church, it was necessary to show that your life was holy, and usually that miracles had been granted to those who had prayed for your help. A *vita* is not a reliable, factual account of the events it describes; the whole purpose is to show just how exceptional a person was. Elena was already known as a prophet and, as Katharine Park notes here, the experiments on her body were 'initiated by a group of pious followers who were eager to promote her cult' (Park, 2006, p. 161). Having a local saint was also good for business: cult could produce income if pilgrims flocked to the place where the saint's body lay, in the hope of a miracle for themselves. This *vita* was written very soon after the events it describes, which means those involved may well have been alive and able to give their own versions of what happened.



Figure 4.1 Raphael Sanzio, *The Ecstasy of St Cecilia*, c.1514, oil on canvas, 239 x 149 cm. National Gallery, Bologna, Italy. Photo: DeAgostini/Getty Images. The altarpiece shows Cecilia, the patron saint of music, listening to the song of the angels, surrounded by St Paul, St John the Evangelist, St Augustine and Mary Magdalene. The choice of saints echoes the life of the person who may have commissioned it, Elena Duglioli: she was a virgin and St Cecilia took a vow of virginity. The saints shown on this altarpiece were also noted for their visions, as was Elena.

Exercise 4.1

Turn to Reading 4.1, Katharine Park, 'The body of Elena Duglioli', 2006, located at the end of the chapter, which describes the death of Elena Duglioli in 1520.

As you read, make brief notes on the following questions:

- How old was Elena when she died, and at what stage of her life?
- Who was present for this examination of her body, and who was in charge?
- What do you find unusual about the description of Elena's body?

Discussion

- Elena died in her late forties. She married, but she stated that she had never had intercourse with her husband. At a stage when most women would have been mothers and have reached menopause, she was still a virgin.
 - Elena's confessor – the priest who would have heard her confessions of sin and conveyed God's forgiveness – seems to have taken the initiative in examining her body after death; it was to him that she had announced her heart had been taken by Jesus. But, very quickly, experts in medicine, not in faith, became involved as well. The confessor worked with surgeons who embalmed Elena's body and also inspected it. The local professor of medicine was present too, although Park notes that he was already on the side of those who wanted to have Elena recognised as a saint.
 - You probably found the claims that Elena's body produced milk very improbable: she was apparently not breastfeeding when alive, and no body can possibly produce milk when dead. Equally we would say that no one can survive without a heart – yet the *vita* claims that Elena's heart was missing. You may also have been surprised that her death was heralded by a comet; what we would see as a natural phenomenon is interpreted here as having a religious meaning. You may have been shocked, too, by the reference to Elena's followers drinking her breast milk – but, to them, it must have seemed a fluid with a deeply spiritual and healing quality. Their actions were similar to Elena's possessing a piece of St Cecilia's body.
-

What would people living in the sixteenth century have made of these events? The idea of a living woman producing both breast milk and menstrual blood at the same time – and making breast milk without having given birth – was very strange. But, according to contemporary beliefs about the body, this was still possible. People thought that the blood flow stopped during pregnancy because the unborn child was formed from, and fed by, the blood; after the birth, the blood was diverted to the breasts to form milk, while that was needed. Elena's milk was particularly unusual because of her age and because she had never even had sex with her husband, let alone been pregnant. Furthermore, Reading 4.1 shows that milk flowing from a dead body was clearly seen as an exceptional event. Like us, those with direct access to Elena's opened body thought that having no heart was 'extraordinary'. You may also be wondering whether what is described here was sufficient to make Elena a saint; it was not. Park goes on to explain that her body was exhumed twice in the next few months, with eight teachers from the universities of Bologna and Padua examining the breasts, but there was no agreement. She was beatified – becoming the Blessed Elena rather than St Elena – only in 1828.

Engaging with the ancients

I chose to open this chapter with the story of Elena because it demonstrates an important point: authoritative statements about the body could come from the person whose body it was, and then be reinforced or challenged by others examining it for themselves. Elena's *vita* also illustrates how different some ideas about the body were from those today. It sits at the junction of religious and scientific views, with the church using medical practitioners to support claims for sainthood, and referring to scientific ideas about the body to decide what was normal and what was exceptional. It therefore challenges some common ideas found in older books, namely that 'religion' and 'science' have always been at loggerheads, and that history is about showing the inevitable triumph of 'science' over other ways of thinking about the bodies of individuals.

But where did these scientific ideas come from? Throughout the period you are studying, the writings of classical Greek and Roman writers had great authority. From the Middle Ages onwards, physicians (see box) were men who had been trained in universities where the syllabus was based on the works attributed to the Greek writer Hippocrates

(c.460 BCE–c.370 BCE), known as the ‘Father of Medicine’, and on others written by, or summarised from, Galen (129–c.216 CE), who had risen to become one of the physicians serving the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius and his family. So the key texts of medicine had been written many centuries earlier, in ancient Greek or in Latin, which was the language of education. This approach to the body, seeing it through the lens of classical writers, is sometimes called ‘learned medicine’, to set it apart from that of ordinary people who had different ideas.

You may be wondering why I am using the word ‘physician’ here, rather than ‘doctor’. It’s an example of how easy – but how misleading – it is to apply modern terms to the past. For me, in a medical context the word ‘doctor’ comes with a lot of conceptual baggage: it is not just used to denote a person who is trained in a method of healing, but carries with it the assumption that the person has received a formal medical education culminating in a degree, is on a register of approved practitioners, and follows rules of ethical behaviour laid down by a professional association.

At the point when Elena’s post-mortem took place, human dissection had only recently become part of medical education and was performed to prove that the ancient Greek and Latin authors were correct, rather than to challenge their claims about what happened inside the body. Those examining Elena’s body understood what they found in terms of ideas associated with these ancient physicians. For example, the *vita* describes her heart as ‘like a piece of soft liver’. While this sounds odd to us, it may have been even more strange for her contemporaries. Following Galen, they thought that the liver, the brain and the heart were the most important organs in the body. The brain dominated the head, the heart the chest, and the liver the digestive system. So, to have the chief organ of the chest looking more like part of the digestive system would have been very odd indeed.

The specific belief that breast milk is diverted menstrual blood also came from the classical world and was widely believed in the early modern period. In around 1595, for example, the English physician Thomas Moffett (1553–1604) wrote that ‘If we would define or describe what Milk is, it seemeth to be nothing but white blood’ (quoted in Orland, 2012, p. 443). Blood was said to be made from food (in the liver) and then converted by heat into milk. Special

channels were thought to exist through which the fluid could move from the womb to the breasts, changing colour in the process.

There is thus a good deal of continuity between ancient, medieval and early modern medicine here. Medieval and early modern writers looked back to Galen as the ‘Prince of Physicians’, and for them the central part of his medical system was the belief in four fluids, known as the humours: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile (see US National Library of Medicine, n.d.). As you discovered in ‘Early modern Europe: an introduction’ (Chapter 1), the key cause of illness was thought to be an imbalance in these humours within the body, and treatment was intended to restore the balance. To reinforce his claims to authority, Galen presented himself as the true interpreter of Hippocrates, and as part of this he asserted that he had taken this particular idea from Hippocrates. In illustrations of the great physicians of history, this connection is demonstrated by showing Galen, Hippocrates and the Arabian physician Avicenna (ibn Sina, 980–1037 CE) sitting together as if they were contemporaries (see Figure 4.2).

In fact, the ‘Hippocratic’ treatises covered a time period longer than any one person’s lifetime and included many different theories of the body, so they can’t all have been by one person. The sheer range of ideas in the treatises means that a wide variety of medical models could be given the seal of approval by being traced back to a ‘Hippocratic’ text. The ‘four humours’ model is found in its full form in only one of the 70 or so ‘Hippocratic’ texts from the ancient Greek world: one entitled *On the Nature of Man*. I’ll discuss the ways in which this model affected the body in the section ‘The body of fluids’ below.

Who is in charge of the body?

Elena’s story also opens up many questions about medical knowledge, and who had the expertise or authority to determine medical questions. Before her death, Elena herself seems to have been very clear about what had happened to her body: Jesus had removed her heart. There was a supernatural cause for its anomalous features. One factor which made Elena’s post-mortem unusual was the location of the events; Bologna, a major university town, had many different medical experts who all wanted to offer their explanations. So, after her death, her individual view was tested by a range of people who gave their own opinions on her body: ordinary people, clerics (priests), surgeons and a professor of medicine. As you saw in Reading 4.1, the surgeons were



Figure 4.2 Galen, Avicenna and Hippocrates, fifteenth century, woodcut. Photo: Science Source/Science Photo Library. This image shows the three main figures of the past honoured in learned medicine. Each carries a book, showing the importance of written sources in giving authority to medicine. Between Hippocrates and Galen is the Muslim writer, Avicenna, whose book *The Canon of Medicine* was based on Galen and was used widely in medical teaching in western Europe. The image comes from a Latin translation of the *Canon*. Here it is Avicenna who is crowned and carries the orb and sceptre, symbols of royalty.

given the task of removing the internal organs and preserving the body by embalming, and then they also took part in the inspection of the organs they had taken out. The professor of medicine was present, although he seems to have been at a distance from the hands-on part. This would have been typical of medicine at this time. In a famous image first printed in 1493 (Figure 4.3), the physician stays well away from the body while a surgeon cuts into it.

Because physicians were the only healers trained in universities, they claimed authority over everyone else involved in healing. They learned not only about medicine but also many other aspects of the natural world: in ancient Greek, the word for ‘nature’ in this broadest sense is *physis*. Because of their training in how the individual body related to the environment and the heavens, physicians claimed that they could not only detect what was wrong, but could also predict what would

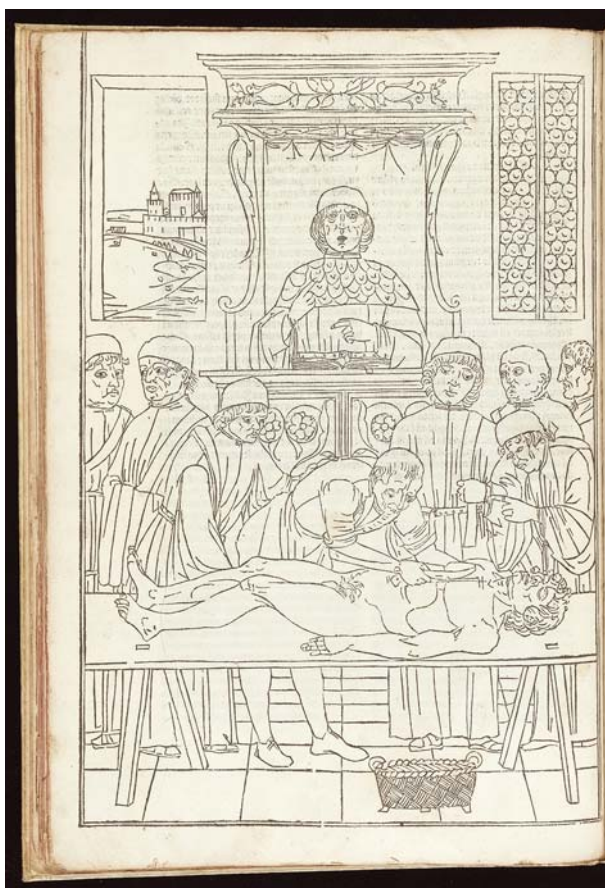


Figure 4.3 Anatomical dissection scene, 1495, woodcut. Published in Johannes de Ketham, *Fasciculo de Medicina*, [F.1a.tit:] 'Fasciculus medicine in quo continentur: videlicet. [F.40b] Hecanothomia fuit emendata ab eximio artium', published by Joannem et Gregorium de Gregoriis fratres, Venice, Italy. Photo: Wellcome Library, London. This image was used to introduce a thirteenth-century anatomy text by Mondino de Liuzzi, *Anathomia*, in the *Fasciculus Medicinae*, a collection first printed in Latin in 1491 and later translated into Italian.

happen next (prognosis, literally 'knowing in advance'). However, the authority of learned physicians was challenged by other groups concerned with the body and health, and by patients who were not always convinced by what physicians said and did.

Surgeons learned through apprenticeship: from practice rather than from books. They could be 'barber-surgeons', whose talent with sharp implements made them the people who controlled both beards and bloodletting. Surgeons treated externally visible conditions – skin diseases, sores, wounds and broken bones – while physicians focused

on internal medicine. These could overlap, bringing the two groups into competition, if a physician thought that what he saw on the surface indicated something going wrong deeper inside the body. Other groups of practitioners in early modern society also exercised control over the body; for example apothecaries, whose role was to prepare ingredients and mix medicines. A later apothecary is shown in action in Figure 4.4. While they were supposed to make up remedies from the prescriptions written by physicians, apothecaries could in fact sell direct to the patient.

Another relevant group was midwives. Their role could extend beyond assisting childbirth, to cover reproductive conditions, fertility and the care of babies. Like surgeons, they had no access to the Latin texts used in universities and they were trained by their peers. Until the 1740s the process of giving birth was normally women's business, attended by other women of the family and female neighbours. 'Normally' is an important word here; men were allowed in for extreme medical emergencies. In mid-eighteenth-century Britain, as you will see in Book 3, men went further, claiming that they were a better option in normal as well as difficult childbirths.

How formal was the role of midwife, outside a major urban centre like London where there were sufficient numbers of births for there to be women whose main occupation was noted on official documents as 'midwife'? Seventeenth-century London midwives learned through long, informal apprenticeships where they worked with a senior midwife and later, when they encountered difficult cases, drew on the professional networks established in this training period (Evenden, 2000). In the countryside, women simply attended each other, although some would gain a good reputation locally as a result of being at difficult births. In 1751 the physician William Clark (1698–1780) suggested that 'any sensible Woman, who has attended Deliveries', could deal with normal labour (Clark, 1751, p. 9).

The church's relationship with midwives could be problematic. If a child seemed unlikely to live, midwives were allowed to perform emergency baptism, but they were also associated with various parts of the body that could be used in magic, such as the umbilical cord and the caul, a membrane that sometimes covers the baby's head at birth. Religion was deployed alongside medical care. Because the mother of Jesus would clearly have had a painless and straightforward birth, religious methods for bringing a difficult birth to a successful conclusion were used too; these included prayers and charms. Catholic



Figure 4.4 An Apothecary Using a Pestle and Mortar to Make up a Prescription, nineteenth century, etching, with watercolour. Published by A. Park, London (Leonard St.). Photo: Wellcome Library, London. This image comes from a time when there were fears as to what precisely went into the medicines apothecaries prepared; the words 'soap suds' on the bottle suggest this. 'Bol' is an abbreviation for *bolus*, Latin for 'ball' and hence for 'pill'.

women could ask to borrow 'the girdle of the Virgin Mary' from any church that claimed to have this; applied to the abdomen, it was believed to help speed the delivery (you can read more about birthing

girdles in a blog cited in the further reading section on the module website).

Although there were many types of practitioner offering medical advice, individuals were expected to be aware of their own bodies, so that any changes in humoral balance could be corrected promptly through diet or behaviour. Writing in 1583, the physician Philip Barrough (d.1600) wrote that ‘every man may judge beste of his owne bodie’ so that he could ‘forestall the coming of many ordinary diseases ... yea and sometime to be able to chase away a malady when it hath alreadie caught hold of the bodie’ (quoted in Lund, 2010, p. 90). Following Galen, medical authorities recommended paying attention to the ‘six non-naturals’, aspects which go beyond the body itself: diet, evacuation and retention, air, exercise, sleep and ‘the passions’. This required self-control, something that men were thought better able to put into practice than women. Indeed, taking a drug may have seemed rather more appealing than the hard work needed to monitor all aspects of one’s life!

A further important source of medical advice, especially for those who could not afford physicians, was the family. Literate women kept books of recipes, collecting and writing down remedies alongside instructions on how to make jam or cakes. These remedies could be herbal mixtures or based on **Galenic** theory, as in the case of those collected by Lady Grace Mildmay (1552–1620), who for nearly 50 years kept a journal in which she included her medical work with her family and neighbours. Remedies women described sometimes carried the name of the person – often male – who had given them the information. Women of the gentry were expected to tend the poor of their village, but some experimented with chemical processes of distillation, working closely with physicians. In the past, historians argued that men tried to suppress this sort of scientific work by women; more recent studies of such women, for example by Alisha Rankin (2013), have challenged this finding. Even at the level of royal families, recipes for remedies were written down, collected into beautifully bound volumes, or passed around in letters.

Books or bodies?

Elena’s story raises the question of how early modern people believed that they should learn about the body. For physicians, the ideas about the body which Galen had formulated remained the basis of medical

practice. But the texts available for study had been copied and re-copied over many centuries before printing began in the fifteenth century, as well as being translated from the original ancient Greek into Arabic, and then into Latin. So some scholars argued that physicians should go back to earlier manuscripts rather than relying on Arabic writers' interpretations of these texts, with all the risks of incorrect translations across the centuries. This led to a Europe-wide quest to find earlier versions of Galenic and Hippocratic works, as copied by medieval scribes.

While the focus was on finding better texts, there was also a move towards translating them into various European vernacular languages, so they could be read by surgeons and midwives without Latin – or, indeed, by anyone literate. For example, the first midwifery texts in vernacular languages were published in the sixteenth century: in German, the *Rose-Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives* (1513) and in English, the *Birth of Mankind* (1540). These manuals have more on the 'before' (ensuring fertility, knowing the signs of conception) and the 'after' (dealing with the afterbirth, management of the post-partum period) than on the stages of a normal birth. They seem to have been written as much for the surgeon or general reader as for the midwife.

But other medical writers thought that finding better texts, or making them more widely available, was the wrong path to take. Instead, they believed, medicine should start from a different source altogether: direct observation of the body. In 1543 the Belgian physician Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) wrote of 'this true book of ours, the human body' (quoted in Cunningham, 1997, p. 226), though the impact of the statement is somewhat undercut by appearing in Vesalius' own enormous book, *On the Fabric of the Human Body*: perhaps the best-known medical book of all time. It was as a result of a renewed interest in using the body itself as evidence that, from around the period in which Elena's story is set, human dissection played an increasingly important role in physicians' training. From examining 'unusual' bodies like hers for religious purposes or to determine the cause of death, dissection entered the medical curriculum too.

However, it is important not to overstate the degree of change here. In practice, what tended to happen was a mixture of old and new. The bodies studied in sixteenth-century anatomy classes could still be interpreted by reading a treatise by Galen and then looking to see this confirmed on the body, rather than actually starting with the body.

Not all groups of practitioners were interested in theory. Observation remained an important tool in creating remedies. For example, while decisions on what remedy to use might be guided by Galenic theories about whether a plant was ‘cold’ or ‘hot’, and to what ‘degree’ of heat, practitioners might instead rely on folk beliefs based on a plant’s observed appearance. Yellow plants were thought to be good for conditions affecting urine, for instance, so dandelion would be used if there was excess fluid, because it would encourage urination.

The learned French physician Laurent Joubert (1529–1582) preserved some popular medical ideas in *The Second Part of the Popular Errors* (1579). As the title suggests, he was not impressed by folk medicine. He wrote in French, not Latin, so that he could help people to think through their beliefs about the body. Most of folk medicine, he wrote, consisted of ‘superstitious remedies having no founding in reason or in experience’; for example, ‘For jaundice. Find some plantain sprouting under a house. Have the person with jaundice piss on the plantain repeatedly until the plant dies. As it dies, the jaundice will go away’ (Joubert, 1995, pp. 191–2). If these popular remedies worked, he added, that was simply by chance: it is only either reason or long experience that forms an acceptable basis for knowledge.

In early modern medicine there was no simple shift from popular knowledge to books, or indeed from books to practical experience. Learning from experience existed alongside learning from ancient Greek and Latin texts. What mattered was what was thought to work best, and not everyone was equally interested in finding out just why it worked.

The body of fluids

From its relatively simple origins in a ‘Hippocratic’ treatise from classical Greece, humoral theory became the dominant model of the body, not least because Galen gave it such a key role. Those people who could never afford to pay a university-trained physician, or read a learned medical text, knew about humours. Whether they picked up knowledge from their families, from books, from songs, from pictures, or from the sorts of assumption that are made in everyday conversation, the model of the body of fluids was widespread. Michael Schoenfeldt writes of ‘the seductive coherence of Galenic humoral theory’ (Schoenfeldt, 1999, p. 3). What he means is that, by about 1500, the basic model of four fluids that made up the body had been

merged with other, widely accepted ideas about the four seasons, four qualities (hot, cold, wet and dry), four elements (earth, air, fire and water), four stages of the lunar month and four ages of life. So, for example, young people were thought to be dominated by the humour of blood, which had the qualities 'hot' and 'wet', was linked to air and was believed to be found more in the spring. Because so many diseases were thought to be the result of too much blood (the original meaning of 'plethora'), bloodletting was often seen as the solution. Furthermore, because blood dominated the body in spring, a regular spring-cleaning of the body would include bloodletting even if a person did not feel unwell. The four humours linked the individual body to the basics of life and of the world.

In any body, blood was considered the key fluid. The belief ran thus: made by the liver, some passed through the veins to nourish the different parts of the body, but some went to the heart, where it was infused with 'vital spirit'. This then travelled through the arteries to parts of the body to help them grow, but some of this improved blood went to the brain, where it gained 'animal' or 'psychic' spirit, responsible for movement and thought, and was transmitted through the nerves. The other three humours were all formed from blood, as were the flesh and the bones. So these fluids affected every part of the body.

Online session 4.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 4.1. This should take around an hour.

Milk was also very important within the body. Thought to be made from blood, it was believed to feed not only the body but also the soul, transmitting virtues and vices to infants along with nourishment. Until the eighteenth century, human breast milk was also used in medicine as a remedy for some diseases, including tuberculosis. Elena's virginal production of milk recalls the many Catholic images, particularly in thirteenth-century Italy, of the Virgin Mary breastfeeding her son Jesus. By the fifteenth century the breastfeeding Mary (as seen in Figure 4.5) had come to represent the virtue of charity, the practical assistance that Christians offered to each other. I think that a

breastfeeding virgin like Elena would have been understood alongside these religious images, because people in early modern Europe thought about themselves through a mixture of lenses – medical, religious, social and moral.

In the Virgin Mary's case, despite retaining her virginity she had given birth, so in medical terms her breast milk could be seen as a natural diversion of her previous menstruation. Normally, however, people would be suspicious if a virgin produced milk. Medical texts assured them that this was possible: milk was 'contrary to nature' in the absence of pregnancy, but with sufficient 'heat' even a virgin could theoretically produce it and, perhaps more alarmingly for us, so could a man who had an excess of the humour of blood.

Those examining Elena's body immediately after her death interpreted her anomalous fluids in spiritual terms. The medical model of the fluid body suggested that Elena, when a virgin in her thirties, should normally not have produced milk, nor should her body have been able to produce both menstrual blood and milk at the same time. After her death it was even more difficult to explain the breast milk medically, as she had no more natural heat and should have been far too 'cold' to concoct blood into milk.

A few months after her death, further examinations of Elena's body took place, and her breasts were found to be far better preserved than the rest of her body. Some university physicians examining the body suggested that the milk was being produced 'naturally' because her breasts had somehow remained hot enough to concoct it from blood.

Now that you have looked at the beliefs about the body that were held in the early modern period, you will have some understanding of how Elena's story made sense to those who observed her, so that they could interpret this exceptional case. Clearly, these ideas have not survived to modern times, so when did these beliefs change? For example, the idea that there are two main kinds of blood, coming from the liver and the heart respectively, clearly does not take into account the circulation of the blood. According to this theory, published by the



Figure 4.5 Jacobello del Fiore, *The Madonna of Humility*, fifteenth century, tempera on gold ground panel, 62 x 44 cm. Photo: Private Collection/© Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.

English physician William Harvey (1578–1657) in 1628, the veins and the arteries are not separate, but part of one system, with all blood sent round the body by the pumping motion of the heart. Yet medical

works like Jane Sharp's *Midwives Book*, written around 50 years *after* Harvey published his theory, still drew on humoral theory. This should act as a warning – change is not automatic just because a theory we now see as correct has entered the arena.

4.2 Stages of life

Every body was governed by its humours, but each person's body was different. This was not simply physical, but also psychological. Everyone was said to have their own 'complexion' or 'temperament', almost like a character type, depending on which of the humours was dominant. A 'hot' temperament – a term we still use – would be seen as the result of too much yellow bile, the hot dry humour. While this could be kept at bay by your way of life, your body might still have a tendency towards this humour. Gender added a further layer of complexity. Men were hotter and drier, so they were more susceptible to yellow bile. This meant that an angry or violent outburst from a man was something to be expected, but in a woman it was seen as 'unnatural'.

Bodies also changed over time. People in Tudor and Stuart England used various models of the 'ages of man', based on classical and medieval sources. They disagreed on how many age periods there were; often, as in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, there were seven 'ages', each lasting for seven years. Due to the harshness of their lives, many of those who reached old age would be considerably weaker and more vulnerable to ill health compared with Europeans of the same age today. In the 'ages of man' model, 'old age' was often thought to be the final seven-year period, from 42 to 49 years of age, although sometimes it was thought to start at 49 and sometimes even later.

In the humoral model, everyone passed through the same stages of life. In the Galenic theory of temperament, we all move from moist and warm in infancy to dry and cold in old age as the balance of qualities in our bodies shifts. I'll return to this at the end of the chapter, when thinking about melancholy caused by the dominance of black bile in the body, associated with the later stages of life in which even men 'cooled down'.

You've seen how Elena's breast milk, which at first seemed so difficult to understand, begins to make more sense in the light of theories of the manufacture and transformation of bodily fluids which were well known at the time of her death. Although a virgin, she showed features of a maternal body. So she lay outside the normal categories into which women's bodies were supposed to fit over their life cycle: virgin, wife, mother and widow. Throughout the period covered by this module, becoming a 'woman' meant menstruating, as a sign of

readiness for marriage. In the lectures he gave at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary in 1748–49, the eminent physician John Rutherford noted of one patient: ‘she had not been what is Call’d a Woman that is she had never had her Menses’ (Wellcome MS 6888, fol. 165r, cited in Churchill, 2012, pp. 104–5). Ideally, however, first menstruation, marriage (or formal betrothal) and losing one’s virginity would happen close together and in that order, ensuring that the first child born was guaranteed to have been fathered by the woman’s legitimate husband. And ideally, then, women should move very quickly from childhood to adulthood.

The extra stage: adolescence as a problem

Becoming a man was not always so straightforward. Whatever their views on how many age periods there were, sixteenth-century writers ‘nearly always distinguished a stage of life between childhood and adulthood which they usually called youth’ (Griffiths, 1996, p. 20). Some described not just ‘youth’ but also ‘adolescence’. While scholars used to believe that the ‘birth of adolescence’ was connected to the conditions of the labour market in the nineteenth century, other writers have more recently shown that worries about adolescence also existed in early modern Europe.

When and why did a concern with adolescence develop? The humoral model of the body, with its focus on ‘fours’ rather than ‘sevens’, has just four stages of life: childhood, adolescence/youth, maturity and old age. In adolescence, the ‘springtime’ of the body, the dominant humour is the hot and wet one, blood, which is also associated with lust. So humoral medicine already makes adolescence into a problem stage.

In the early modern period, social factors may have led to more concerns about this life stage. In England, for example, Barbara Hanawalt has argued that the fifteenth century was a time of ‘disruption and transition’: ‘youth became a focus for anxieties about a better future’ (Hanawalt, 1996, p. 155). Many guilds extended the period of apprenticeship during the fifteenth century, so that young men were still classed as ‘adolescent’ until as late as 28 years of age (Ben-Amos, 1994, p. 93). ‘Adolescents’ were thought to be riotous, prone to brawling and drinking, roaming the streets in gangs and posing a threat to respectable people. All that excess blood in their bodies led them astray.

For women, the institution of service was more important than apprenticeship. Girls entering service also found an extra stage of the female life cycle after puberty and before marriage, usually from around 12–14 years of age until their mid- or late twenties. This meant that the ideally rapid passage from childhood to adulthood was no longer possible, leading to concerns about these young women which we'll explore later in the chapter.

Another factor playing a role in concerns about adolescence here may have been later marriage. In mid-sixteenth-century England, around 40 per cent of the population were aged under 15. The classic work by the historical demographers E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield suggests peaks in the proportion of young people in 1556, again in 1576, and then 'a sustained rise until 1621' (cited in Griffiths, 1996, p. 5). This was accompanied by a high age at first marriage, as late as 28 for men and 26 for women. This conforms to the north-west European marriage pattern discussed in 'Households, families and populations: counting the people of early modern Europe' (Chapter 3): marriage in the mid- to late twenties, with husbands two or three years older than their wives. In south and east Europe marriage occurred in the teens, or between a man in his late twenties or early thirties and a considerably younger woman (Wiesner, 1993, p. 57). Even if female puberty in the sixteenth century occurred around the age of 14 (see, for example, Wiesner, 1993, p. 44), in northern Europe there would still have been a longer gap between puberty and marriage than was found even in the nineteenth century. For women, this long gap between **menarche** and marriage led to concerns that if they remained too long unmarried they would become ill.

To investigate further the themes of the links between life stages and health, and between medical theory and popular ideas about the body, I now want to introduce you to two conditions: greensickness and melancholy. Greensickness was seen as a condition of young girls at puberty, best cured by marriage. It was focused on the humour of blood. Melancholy illustrates the links between body and mind in humoral medicine, and the effect of ageing on one's humoral balance.

Greensick girls

In the mid-sixteenth century a new diagnosis emerged: the 'disease of virgins'. The use of labels for diseases (rather than seeing them purely as a result of too much or too little of a particular humour) was a

feature of the early modern period. These labels were not always stable; for example, what is probably syphilis might be called ‘the French pox’, ‘the Italian disease’, the ‘disease of Naples’, the ‘Turkish disease’, the ‘Christian disease’ and so on – depending on who was speaking. The ‘disease of virgins’ rapidly took on further names, including ‘chlorosis’: an invented and deliberately classical-sounding label based on the ancient Greek word for a sort of yellowish-green, *chloros*. In French it was ‘the pale colours’; in English, ‘greensickness’.

Modern attempts to work out what greensickness really was are doomed to fail; it had many symptoms, and retrospective diagnosis cannot produce a simple one-to-one match to any modern condition. In the next online session I’ll be approaching greensickness through a range of different types of source material in Latin and in English, and through the perspectives of men and women, physicians and patients.

Online session 4.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 4.2. This should take around an hour and a half.

Melancholy: mind and matter

In online session 4.2 Lange’s description of Anna mentions mental disturbance – madness and delirium – alongside physical symptoms. In humoral theory, body and mind were considered as a single unit. Each could affect the other. For example, the Puritan writer William Perkins (1558–1602), in a treatise published only in 1642, noted: ‘the distraction of the mind will often breed a distemper in the body, and the distemper of the body likewise will sometimes cause distractions of mind’ (quoted in van Duinen, 2011, p. 124).

I’ve already noted that yellow bile led to anger. Those with a phlegmatic complexion, dominated by the cold and wet, would have excess bodily fluids such as sputum and catarrh, but were also thought to be slow in their thought processes. The unity of body and mind meant that for conditions that may today be classified as mental disorders treatment would still hinge on cleansing, purging, or drying out the excess humours. For example, in its 1515 list of remedies the hospital of S. Maria Nuova in Florence included ‘pills of wild

cucumber that purge choler and melancholy' (quoted in Henderson, 2006, p. 312).

Melancholy and age

Melancholy – an excess of black bile (in Greek, *melainê cholê*), the cold dry humour – was shown by sadness or despondency (see Figure 4.6) and the rejection of company, but also by constipation. The condition may sound similar to depression today, but as usual these similarities may mask differences.



Figure 4.6 Cesare Ripa, *Man reading with a bag of earth, corresponding to temperament based on melancholic humour*, c.1610, woodcut. Published by P. P. Tozzi, Padua, Italy. Photo: Wellcome Library, London. This is part of a set of figures representing the four temperaments (Italian *complessioni*) determined by the four humours, and showing their affinities with the elements.

A popular seventeenth-century medical text, *The General Practise of Medecine* (1634), written under the pseudonym Philiatreus (which translates as ‘Friend of Medicine’), probably by the Edinburgh physician John Makluire (b.1601/02), describes melancholy in detail. It locates it after a section on yellow bile which states that ‘The manly age which is betwixt 25 and 35 for in that, choler doth abound’ and before one on phlegm, said to affect ‘the old age which is from 49 to the term of life: for in that age, by reason of the weakness of the natural heat, much phlegm is engendered’ (Philiatreus, 1634; spelling modified). The text mentions ‘burnt bile’, another term for yellow bile, and suggests that black bile is made from this. Black bile was thus seen as the final humour to be produced, with other writers saying that it was made out of the ‘dregs’ of the blood.

Exercise 4.2

Turn to Reading 4.2, Philiatreus, ‘The melancholic distemper’, 1634, located at the end of the chapter. I have modified the spelling of the extract to make it easier to follow, but the grammar makes it quite difficult to read. Try reading it through a couple of times to get the general sense. Use the knowledge of the humours that you’ve developed to help you. Then try to answer the following questions (but don’t worry if you don’t spot all the relevant information):

- What are the causes of melancholy?
- What are the signs that this is the correct diagnosis?
- How can melancholy be prevented?

(Note that the reading refers to the ‘melt’, a word for the spleen, which was the organ where black bile was thought to reside. A ‘siege’ is a word for a toilet, so ‘sieges’ here means defecation.)

This should take around 40 minutes.

Discussion

- Melancholy is increased in cold dry conditions, and a weak spleen can contribute to it. Someone whose constitution is normally hot can also develop it if the blood changes. It is most likely at age 35–45 and in autumn. Foods which are heavy and sticky also contribute. So does too much thinking or study, because these reduce the amount of exercise, cool the body and make the humours thicker.
- Some signs pointing to the correct diagnosis would be visible to a casual observer, such as a change in skin colour, loss of weight or

strange appetites. For other evidence of melancholy there would need to be a medical examination; for example, to detect the hardness of the spleen and the distinctive pulse. But the patient also needs to tell their physician about their sensations of fear, 'conceits' or foolish ideas, and bad dreams.

- Other forms of bleeding 'suppress' melancholy: haemorrhoids, menstruation or bleeding from the bowel. 'Scabs' here probably means weeping skin diseases. And 'medicine' is useful too, so bloodletting can help to prevent melancholy.
-

Melancholy: a manly diagnosis?

One aspect of melancholy worth considering is its role in defining what it was to be a man in early modern Europe. Men were supposed to be the rational sex, yet melancholy threatened this. In the second part of Margaret Cavendish's play, *The Second Part of Youths Glory, and Deaths Banquet*, published in 1662, the character Father Love, who is mourning his daughter, says:

Multitudes of Melancholy thoughts crowd in my brain,
And run to pull down Reason from his Throne.

(Cavendish, 1662, p. 172)

Logically, melancholy, caused by a cold humour, should be more common in women, the colder sex. But the effect of the life course was that older men were also likely to suffer from melancholy as their hot dry bodies were cooled down by the process of ageing, making them more like women. If they suffered from melancholy, men not only lost their superior ability to reason but were more likely to become very emotional, and thus further feminised. The diagnosis would have excused them from carrying out some of their responsibilities, but this risked 'unmanning' them. Women's melancholy was thought to be a short-term condition, but men's was more serious as it was likely to become a more severe mental disorder: mania.

Across Europe, both medical writers and those who wrote for a more popular audience claimed that there was a rise in the prevalence of melancholy in men from the late sixteenth century onwards. Following Aristotle, who thought that melancholy went with imagination and

intellect, they concentrated on the connection between the symptoms and overusing one's mind in study or important matters of family or state, as in Philiatreus' description in Reading 4.2: 'occupied in great affairs'. It could be seen as a disorder that even conferred some value on the sufferer. Modern scholars have often taken statements of the rise of melancholy literally and looked for a cultural or social cause, such as a reaction to the high death rates from the plague, or the result of too many educated men with not enough roles to be filled. This suggests an interesting link between the inherited traditions of classical medicine and the realities of social change.

But concerns about the rise of melancholy also related to the way that it stopped men fulfilling their proper roles in the world. In a 1743 description of a patient with melancholy we read of 'The sadness that Monsieur has suffered for some time and the physical and mental fatigue to which he was given, without the ability to react positively to his domestic affairs' (quoted in Weston, 2011, pp. 228–9). The key point here was the loss of self-control. The specific humoral imbalance of melancholy challenged the established order of society, in which husbands exerted authority over wives, and old men over younger men. A man should be able to 'perpetuate his line, provide for his family's health'; he was someone who 'behaved in a morally acceptable way, had strength of character, and was fearless when confronted with pain' (Weston, 2011, p. 229). Those with melancholy, however, would abandon their social duties and hide away.

Jared van Duinen has studied the Barringtons, a wealthy gentry family in Essex, one of whom was Sir Thomas Barrington (c.1585–1644). His staunchly Puritan father had been an exemplary man, prominent in the local community, national politics and the army. After his father's death in 1628, it became clear that Thomas was very different from him. He had emotional outbursts and was not in control of his passions. In a letter he described how he had 'strange throws of the spleen' and wrote that he had told his mother 'if there be any ill spirit that is no devil, it is Melancholy' (BL Egerton Ms 2650, fol. 186, quoted in van Duinen, 2011, p. 121).

While men at the top of the social hierarchy worried about their inability to fulfil their duties, those further down the hierarchy laughed at them.

Collections of jokes and poems show a very different approach to melancholy. *An Antidote against Melancholy: Made up in Pills* (1661) opens with a poem of which the first verse is:

There's no Purge 'gainst Melancholy,
But with Bacchus to be jolly;
All else are but Dregs of Folly.
Cures the Spleen. Revives the Blood,
Puts thee in a merry Mood:
Who can deny such physick good?

(Anonymous, 1661)

This suggests that the best cure for melancholy is alcohol. A ballad of a similar date suggests the same. The chorus of *Englands Triumph: Or, The Subjects Joy* (first printed around 1673–90) goes:

All you that troubled are with Melancholly,
The *Spaniards* have a Juyce will make you jolly:
Good Wine, good Wine, I say's the only thing,
That can for such distemper comfort bring:
It comforts the heart, and quickens each vein,
If a man be half dead, it will fetch him again.

The sixth verse runs:

Let Doctors cure themselves of grief,
and each Apothecary,
We are sure to give ourselves relief,
by drinking of Canary,
If melancholly disturbs the mind,
and makes our hearts full sad,
We know where we good Sack can find
and that will make us brisk and glad,
and that will make us brisk and glad.

(University of California Santa Barbara, n.d.)

(Canary and sack are types of wine.)

Englands Triumph suggests that neither physicians nor apothecaries can cure melancholy; the remedy is one which patients can find for themselves. In both greensickness and melancholy, we can see a range of types of source discussing the causes and the cures. While there is overlap here, the ballads – which assume a shared knowledge across society about the basics of these conditions – take a far less serious approach, whereas the medical writers present these conditions as very dangerous and in need of the treatment which only they can offer.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking you to think about how Elena Duglioli's strange breast milk helps us to understand the humoral body. I've shown you how religion and medicine worked together, not in opposition, in defining how the body was supposed to behave. We have also seen how knowledge about the body was spread across different levels of society, with a wide range of groups – from family members to learned physicians – not only sharing that knowledge, but making claims to be the best source of healing for individuals. While there was considerable, and explicit, continuity with the ancient world, during the early modern period the body itself became a source of knowledge, and new disease labels emerged.

What my two case studies of greensickness and melancholy also show is that in early modern medicine your gender, age and rank would affect the diagnosis you were given. Unmarried girls were more likely to be diagnosed with greensickness, men of the higher social ranks and of mature years with melancholy. This is despite clear areas of overlap in the symptoms. One feature of melancholy was a depraved appetite: in greensickness, in addition to Anna's symptom of 'aversion [towards food] in the stomach' (as you read in online session 4.2), there was commonly the habit of eating dirt or clay. The greensick girl in the ballad linked in online session 4.2 was 'ready to despair' and looking for a man 'Before I am quite mad, to end my misery'. In an older man, these sensations of despair were seen as evidence of melancholy. It is significant that when women were diagnosed with melancholy, like girls with greensickness, they too were advised to marry. So I would conclude that the humoral body not only created social distinctions between the sexes and different age groups, but also reinforced these. The fluid body was a way of solidifying difference.

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Readings

Reading 4.1 Katherine Park, 'The body of Elena Duglioli'

Source: Park, K. (2006) *The Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, New York, Zone Books, pp. 161–2.

The death of Elena Duglioli had been heralded by portents, including a comet that appeared over the house of one of her followers. A woman from a respected citizen family in Bologna, Elena had gained local renown for her gifts of vision and prophecy. After she died, in September 1520, people flocked to see her corpse. According to her anonymous *vita*, written about ten years later, “they adored it and kissed it like a precious relic, sprinkling it all that morning with fragrant herbs.” That evening, it was transferred to the church of San Giovanni in Monte, where some years earlier Elena had commissioned a chapel dedicated to Saint Cecilia. There it underwent a series of what the author of the *vita* described as “experiments” (*experientie*) initiated by a group of pious followers who were eager to promote her cult. Although Elena had initially gained fame for her chastity – fifteen years earlier, she had revealed that, like Saint Cecilia and Saint Valerian, she and her considerably older husband, Benedetto Dall’Olio, had lived together in complete continence since their marriage – the experimenters were more interested in other, more fleshly manifestations of her holiness. She told her confessor, Pietro Ritta of Lucca, that in 1507 Jesus had permanently removed her heart from her body, and three years later, when she was in her late thirties, she had begun to lactate and menstruate; Jesus had subsequently informed her that “the milk in her virginal breasts would last until the end of the world.”

[p. 162]

The postmortem experiments conducted on Elena’s corpse focused initially on her breasts. The first two nights following her death, while her body was lying in the church of San Giovanni in Monte, Ritta uncovered her chest in the presence of a number of laypeople and clerics and pressed her breasts with his hands, producing a gush of “pure and white milk.” Several of her most devoted supporters suckled from Elena’s corpse, which was then eviscerated and embalmed by two local surgeons. The third night Ritta again expressed milk from her

breasts. At that point, recalling her claim that Jesus had taken her heart to be with him in heaven, Ritta ordered an inspection of her remains by the two surgeons who had embalmed her the previous evening. Battista of Bologna and Damiano. [...] Also present was Girolamo of Firenzuola, a professor of medicine at the University of Bologna and one of Elena's most ardent followers. The inspection of Elena's viscera yielded extraordinary results. Her heart was missing, having been replaced by a pale, flat, flaccid mass, which the author of her *vita* described as being "like a piece of soft liver." Indeed, he noted, it was "so unlike a heart that a man familiar with that human organ would never have recognized it as a heart. And the doctors in attendance said that it was a very strange thing that they had never heard of anything like it."

Reading 4.2 'The melancholic distemper', 1634

Source: Philiatreus (1634) *The General Practise of Medicine*, Edinburgh, John Wreittoun.

[The spelling in this reading has been modernised for clarity.]

The melancholic distemper is known first by the causes productive of melancholy, as are: The temperature cold and dry, with a debility of the melt, or hot from the beginning, but become cold by change, for if any hot and dry before, by an adjustment of the blood engenders much black bile, he becomes cold and dry, and in end melancholic.

The declining age which is betwixt 35 and 45, for melancholy doth abound in that age, for succeeding to the youth, which is the most bilious of all, it receives the burnt bile.

The harvest, in it also melancholy abounds, for succeeding to the Summer, it receives the burnt bile from it.

Gross food and viscuous, as brown bread, pork flesh, beef, hares flesh, Harts flesh [venison], chiefly salted, thick black wine, beer, and old cheese.

The life sad, occupied in great affairs in contemplation, studying without recreation or exercise of the body, for by it the natural heat diminishes, and the humours become gross and thick.

The suppression of melancholy that used to be by the haemorrhoids, monthly courses, sieges, with scabs or by medicine.

As also by the signs of melancholy, predominant in the body, as are: the colour brown or blackish, of the face and all the body, the skin full of scabs, hardness, swelling and pain of the melt: The habitude of the body dry and lean, the visage sad and heavy: fear, silence, solitariness, urine, imagination, conceits: for the constancy of the spirit comes of an humour melancholic.

The mind slow to wrath, but being incensed, hard to be appeased.

The sleep troubled with horrible dreams as with sights of evil spirits, tortures of death, sepulchres, and other things fearful.

The pulse little, slow, hard.

The appetite depraved, sometime disordered, by reason of a sour matter adhering to the orifice of the stomach.

The water [urine] clear and white, where there is no melancholy mixed, but thick and black where there is some mixed.

Chapter 5 Work and reward

Anne Laurence

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand that the term ‘work’ has many different meanings
- understand who worked, and when, in early modern Europe
- read and use some of the primary sources historians use for studying work
- understand how historians use different approaches to studying work.

Introduction

It seems obvious at first that ‘work’ has a historical dimension; after all, in early modern Europe there were no tyre fitters, IT consultants, call-centre workers or traffic wardens. On the other hand, there were wheelwrights, for example, and professional scribes who wrote letters for illiterate clients; and many people had to spend significant amounts of time fetching water from wells and springs. It would be easy to enumerate all kinds of jobs that had to be done then that don’t need to be done in western Europe today – and vice versa.

This chapter is about two aspects of work. The first concerns what people in early modern Europe did and how they were rewarded for it. So we shall look at what jobs people did, how they were organised and remunerated, who worked, and when and where they worked. The second aspect concerns how historians study work: some use official occupational designations (butcher, baker, candlestick-maker) to identify how people supported their families and participated in the economy; some use descriptors (preparing food, caring for the sick, weeding) to try to understand the complexity of most people’s working lives. These different approaches embody different approaches to the past. The historians who look at occupations are interested in measuring economic activity, while those who look at descriptors are interested in the meanings of work in people’s lives, at how they spent their time regardless of whether they were paid. The set book is primarily concerned with the first kind of history, but there is much more to the study of work. Work isn’t just about jobs; it’s about how society is organised and people’s attitudes to gender, age, class and education. Above all, for many people work was about survival in societies in which there was no safety-net. Let us start by looking at the moral value attached to work in early modern Europe.

5.1 Early modern beliefs about work

Although the origins of the proverb ‘The devil finds work for idle hands’ are obscure, the sentiment was to be found everywhere in early modern household manuals and in political tracts. Manuals of farming and ‘huswifery’ (or housework – which included making domestic goods as well as tasks such as cleaning and cooking), aimed at the minority of the population who could read, extolled the virtues of work and denounced the sin of idleness.

John Dod and Robert Cleaver, two English clergymen, published an account of the duties of parents towards their children in 1621. It is, like all such manuals, a prescription for what parents *should* do rather than a description of what they *did* do:

that [parents] keep [children] from idlenesse, the mother of all mischiefs, and bring them vp either in learning, or in some good art or occupation, whereby they may get their liuing with honestie and truth, when they shall come to age, and yeares of discretion.

(Dod and Cleaver, 1621, unpaginated)

While household manuals taught the value of work for individuals, political **polemicists** looked for ways to deal with people who were not working. Pamphlets discussed the lack of work in various industries and the evils of idleness for the un- and under-employed. Local and central government officials worried about whether the populace were able to support themselves, and about there being a sufficiently large and suitably trained workforce to provide soldiers and sailors and to manufacture enough goods for the local population, with a surplus for export. In 1656 Louis XIV (1638–1715, reigned 1643–1715) issued an **edict** (or order) in France (note that a ‘hospital’ was an institution to house the poor, not a place to cure the sick):

We wish and command that poor beggars of both sexes, both able-bodied and disabled, be employed in a hospital engaged in works, manufacture and other employment, according to their capacities, as is amply set out in the order signed by our hand, and included under the counter-seal of these present, and which we wish to be carried out in accordance with its terms and content.

(Kekewich, 1994, p. 127)

This resulted in the foundation in Paris of a large **workhouse**, the Hôpital Général de la Salpêtrière (which you will come across again in your work in Chapter 6). A further edict of 1662 decreed that all French cities should have such an institution. In Lyon, for instance, girls were trained to spin silk for the local silk-weavers. But what goods were manufactured in the workhouses is not always known; it was the work rather than its outcome that was important (Norberg, 1985, pp. 89–90).

The policy of incarcerating the poor to ensure that they worked gainfully was adopted in other countries too. In the Amsterdam Spinhuis (spinning house), which was partly a penal institution, women sewed and spun (Figure 5.1); in its male counterpart, the Rasphuis, timber was grated or rasped into wood shavings that were used in the dye industry. English commentators proposed similar schemes, though they were not put into effect comprehensively until the nineteenth century. But what kinds of work did people do outside institutions?



Figure 5.1 Pierre Fouquet Junior after Hermanus Pertrus Schouten, *Interieur van het Spinhuis te Amsterdam*, 1783, engraving, 28 x 39 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-1930-17. An illustration of the interior of the spinning house in Amsterdam. The women were supervised by an overseer.

5.2 Types of work

Exercise 5.1

Now turn to Steve Hindle, 'The early modern economy' in the set book and skim-read pages 79–87 – you read part of this in your work on 'Early modern Europe: an introduction' (Chapter 1). Make a note of the chief kinds of employment and how they changed over the period.

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

The first paragraph tells us that agriculture, manufacturing/industry and trade/services were the main economic sectors. We may deduce that since the economy was 'fundamentally agrarian', agriculture provided the greatest amount of work (though the most important economic sectors are not necessarily those that employ the greatest number of people). Industry was significant, and much of this work took place in the countryside. Textile manufacture was the most important form of industry.

After 1650, there were changes in agriculture that led to the introduction of new crops and a reduction in the amount of labour required to work the land. By contrast, there were few technological changes in industry. However, there was an increasing reliance by manufacturers on breaking down processes so that separate parts of a process were carried out by different workers paid on piece rates.

We often think of work as the process behind the production of goods. But work can take many forms. In early modern Europe, as in the modern world, members of professions worked by providing expert services in law and medicine. Their work was regulated by professional bodies such as the Inns of Court and the Royal College of Physicians. Politicians and statesmen holding office also worked, though their remuneration was often in the form of perks (then known as 'perquisites') such as selling offices and privileges to other people, and benefits such as exemption from taxation, rather than a salary. It might be argued that their wives worked too, in the sense of often being part of their husbands' spheres of influence. Many occupations (including those of politics, government and diplomacy) were, in some

respect, ‘family’ businesses. Early modern Europe was a patronage society in which gift-giving and the receipt and bestowal of favours were part of the normal exchange of life, from royal diplomacy down to the lowliest craftspeople.

Protestant and Catholic priests and ministers of religion also worked, providing spiritual services within communities. Members of religious orders in Catholic Europe worked by praying for the souls of the dead and as missionaries both in Europe and in the New World. Women’s religious orders were mainly enclosed, but after the Counter-Reformation a number of female orders devoted to nursing, teaching and **poor relief** were founded. Teachers in universities were usually clerics, as were many schoolteachers. The church was also a vast employer: estate managers looked after church-owned land, treasurers managed church finances, canon lawyers dealt with disputes and so on. The church often controlled other occupations too, for example by licensing midwives.

There were also some activities referred to as ‘work’ in the early modern period which might not be recognised as such today. Domestic embroidery was often referred to as work. Religious duties such as private prayer and spiritual self-examination, much advocated and practised by Puritans, were also described as work. In French the word ‘travail’, used to mean work, also means labour and, by extension, labour in childbirth (this is not to be confused with the English word ‘travail’, which has a meaning closer to ‘trouble’).

Waged work

In modern society, the model of work is driven by ideas about the regular payment of wages (and often benefits such as pensions) in return for labour. Most people who work for money have an employer, whether it be a single person or a large corporation. Although we distinguish employment from self-employment (running one’s own business), the concept of regular payments, set hours, accounting and being part of the taxed population dominates ideas about work.

In early modern Europe, work was more complex. Many people worked for a variety of employers, as day labourers, and for longer or shorter hours according to the season. For instance in pastoral regions, where people’s livelihoods depended on grazing livestock, there was little paid work in the winter. In these societies it was common to find

that families had a number of different sources of income, such as the sale of livestock, wool or dairy products, and spinning and weaving.

Although almost everyone worked, they were not always directly remunerated for it. In peasant households, families worked together to raise crops for their own use, to sell and to pay their landlord. In household businesses, it might have been the men who officially had the skills to make items such as doublets, saucepans or jewellery, but many of the tasks associated with the business were carried out by women and servants. So remuneration is perhaps better understood as a payment for the efforts of a household rather than a wage for an individual.

Wages are more visible for the lowliest kind of worker: the day labourer. One of the duties of seventeenth century English justices of the peace was to set rural wage rates; urban rates were set by the mayors and local government officers. This duty was imposed by the Statute of Artificers, an Act of Parliament of 1563. Rates for domestic industries, such as spinning and weaving, were rarely set: the assessments dealt mainly with agricultural workers, craftsmen and domestic servants.

Exercise 5.2

Turn to Reading 5.1, 'A Bedfordshire wage assessment of 1684', located at the end of the chapter. What do you notice about the rates of pay for different types of work and for different groups of workers?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

The list gives daily wage rates for some occupations, yearly rates for others and **piecework** rates for others. Much of the work paid on a day rate was seasonal: the agricultural work gives no rates for the period September to March, and many activities were paid at a lower rate for the winter.

Adults and those under the age of 18 were paid at different levels. We don't know at what age those under 18 were assumed to have started work. Women were paid what seems to be less for the same work: the rate for women haymakers was less than that for men (and men were assumed to consume more meat and drink: the allowance for women haymakers was 3d, while for men it was 4d, though the rate for meat and drink was the same for men and women reapers). Men and women

were assumed to carry out different forms of work: little of the piecework listed here seems to have been work for women.

In 1563 a comprehensive framework for the regulation of labour relations, apprenticeship and wages was passed in England and the wage rates set in Bedfordshire that you saw in Reading 5.1 were loosely based on those specified in the statute, though they were not the same in every county: Bedfordshire rates for craftsmen seem to have been higher than those in neighbouring counties, while those for women servants seem to have been lower (Willan, 1947, p. 131). The rates remained similar for many decades because there was little inflation; such variation as there was seems to have been a response to the labour supply (that is, greater or fewer numbers of people available to do the work) rather than to the cost of living. This system of legally enforceable regulation continued in England until the late eighteenth century.

Although England was substantially a wage economy by the sixteenth century, many people received some of their remuneration in kind. Employees and apprentices often lived with the family of the householder, who fed and clothed them as part of their remuneration. As you saw in Reading 5.1, in the Bedfordshire wage assessment two different day rates were specified, one including ‘meat and drink’ for the labourers; there were also two rates for ‘servingmen’, coachmen, butlers and grooms, depending on whether or not clothes (livery) were included. This second group of employees would have worked in richer households, unlike the less well-paid women servants who often worked in relatively modest households.

The wage differential between men and women has been the subject of much discussion among historians. In a study of women’s work, Joyce Burnette has argued that women’s wages were lower because they were less productive than men. She concludes that occupational segregation (men and women performing different tasks or occupations) directed women into occupations where strength was not the pre-eminent requirement, allowing them to earn a market wage in occupations where they had a competitive advantage (Burnette, 2008, p. 327). According to Burnette, the wage difference between men and women reapers and haymakers was an adjustment made for women doing less

work in a day than men. This controversial view has generated a good deal of debate, not least because Burnette believes that market forces were the primary determinant of wage rates and that it was the market rather than social attitudes that excluded women from those occupations where they were at a competitive disadvantage.

However, censuses for the German Black Forest districts of Wildberg and Ebhausen in the seventeenth century show that there were few agricultural tasks, including ploughing – traditionally seen as demanding too much strength for women – that women did not perform at all (Ogilvie, 2003, p. 211). Other critiques of Burnette's work point to wage rates being determined just as much by custom and social attitudes about the relative places of men's work and women's work, and by beliefs about men's capacity to support their families, as by market forces. We shall return later to the question of men's work and women's work.

Receiving wages did not necessarily make people economically secure. Gregory King (1648–1712), whose work we would call demography but which in the seventeenth century was known as political arithmetic, estimated in 1688 that 20 per cent of the population of England had incomes of £2 or less a year (Kelly and Ó Gráda, 2014, p. 358). These incomes would have been made up of some poor relief and payments for occasional work.

Norwich was the largest provincial English city in the sixteenth century. In anticipation of national legislation regulating poor relief, the city authorities commissioned a census of those they considered poor. In a population of 10,625 around a quarter were listed: 525 (5 per cent) men, 860 (8 per cent) women and 926 children (under the age of 16). The information given was the name, age and occupation of the householder; the names, ages and occupations of the rest of the family; whether the householder was able-bodied [hable]; where they lived (usually in someone else's house); how much a week they received in alms; whether they were 'veri pore' or 'indeferent'. It is not clear whether 'indeferent' meant that there was no information or that they were regarded as only moderately poor. 'Abroade' meant outside Norwich, not overseas.

Exercise 5.3

Turn to Reading 5.2, *The Norwich Census of the Poor 1570*, located at the end of the chapter. This reading features the first four entries of that census (Roger Mason to Alyce Hanligh). Read these entries closely. What do you notice about occupations and incomes?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

Here we see both men's and women's occupations specified, the women mainly spinners or making buttons and strings (strings were the ribbons used for attaching a doublet to a skirt or breeches, or for lacing doublets). Age was not a determinant of whether someone worked: Elizabeth Sewel, aged 70, was a spinner, while Alyce Hanligh of the same age had no occupation. Note the comment that the six-year-old daughter of Roger Mason was 'idle' – that is, not working. We see here a clear example of how people who were in work nevertheless needed supplementary alms in order to survive. A supplement of 3d a week amounted to 13 shillings a year: way below the £2 noted by King.

In her study of Norwich, Margaret Pelling observes that the age group least evident in the census of the poor is the 15–24-year-olds; there were also very few single men (Pelling, 1998, p. 136). These were the people who would have been most able to travel to get work and to command a reasonable wage. What is perhaps surprising is that men in occupations such as tailoring could not earn enough to support their families. As far as the Norwich authorities were concerned, each household's income was being assessed, hence the emphasis on the work of women and children.

Unwaged and involuntary work

A great deal of work in the early modern world was unpaid. Much domestic work, such as childcare, care for the sick and old, growing food in gardens and so forth, was carried out by people within their own households for no direct payment. In addition, there were organisations that could demand work of individuals and groups of people. Two important features distinguish such work: first, whether the requirement was imposed by the state (as in military **conscription**)

or by a private individual (such as a landlord or feudal superior); and, second, whether the requirement to work (or to provide a percentage of crops, which amounted to a percentage of work) was in return for some material benefit.

Many forms of land tenure required landholders to render to their landlords labour service or the produce from land that tenants had worked themselves, though increasingly these requirements were, in western Europe, being commuted into money payments (rent). In England peasants are considered to have vanished when the old style of feudal land tenure was superseded in the fifteenth century by tenancies for which cash rents were paid. However, in most of Europe tenancies that tied occupants to a place and an overlord continued, sometimes even into the nineteenth century. Returns to the overlord were not necessarily rendered in labour or military service; they could be provided through a share of crops, a system often found in Italy and France. In central Europe forms of serfdom continued: in Russia serfs held land communally and repartitioned it periodically, but their landlords had power over whether they could move off the land and were their only source of access to the law (Dennison, 2011, pp. 42–3). In Prussia only nobles could own land, which they allowed serfs to hold in return for a combination of paying rent and providing labour to work their own demesne lands (their personal estates); and, as in Russia, landlords had complete legal control over their tenants (Eddie, 2013, p. 30).

There were other forms of labour service. In England parish authorities could requisition labour to repair roads and bridges; France had a similar system. Most countries had military conscription in time of war; in England both king and Parliament introduced conscription in 1643. In some countries seamen could also be conscripted.

5.3 When and where did people work?

Working times

As we have seen, much work did not take place all year round, or equally during the day, week, season or year. Many people worked, as we would say, part time, or had a portfolio of different occupations. Apart from agricultural work and fishing, some forms of manufacture relied on the seasonal availability of materials. In the early years of the period, soldiering was confined to the spring and summer months, though by the eighteenth century it could take place all year round. Fairs and markets were often held at particular times of year – fairs were used as employment bureaux for annually contracted workers such as farm servants.

For large numbers of people time was measured by the rhythm of the seasons, the week, the day or the tides. The seasons brought changes in activity because of the weather, the hours of daylight, the state of crops and livestock, the Christian calendar of saints' days and feasts (holidays), and local festivals and feasts often associated with royal or civic ritual. The saints' days and religious feasts listed in prayer books and almanacs were the only way in which most people could measure the passage of time precisely. Apart from the great festivals of the Christian church (Shrove Tuesday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, Christmas), many different saints were celebrated through holidays, church services and processions. Protestant countries sometimes continued to celebrate certain saints' days while rejecting the theology of the intercession of the saints. Which saints were celebrated differed not only between countries but also between regions, with many regions (especially in Celtic countries) having a large array of very local saints and martyrs. France in the early seventeenth century had more than 30 religious holidays.

In Protestant countries anniversaries of the accession of monarchs and of noteworthy state events and deliverances were often holidays, replacing saints' days. In England the anniversaries of the accession of Queen Elizabeth, the Gunpowder Plot, the execution of Charles I and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 were all commemorated at various times. In the United Provinces (now the Netherlands) the expulsion of the Spaniards at the end of the Dutch War of Independence was celebrated. In 1561 the Scottish reformed church

declared all saints' days to be popish inventions, though craftsmen continued to hold holidays on the date of the patron saint of their craft (Todd, 2000, pp. 123, 128).

The week was marked by the day of rest on Sunday; it might also involve a weekly market. The rhythm of the day was dictated by the hours of daylight, as artificial lighting (candles and oil lamps) was expensive and too dim for detailed work. Tides determined when it was safe and convenient to set sail.



Figure 5.2 One-handed clock, c.1656, but with later pendulum works; the church tower dates from around the thirteenth century. Polebrook, Northamptonshire. Photo: Colin Taylor www.flickr.com/photos/sheldrickfalls/

Since much work took place in households (though not necessarily indoors), there was no clocking on or going to work. Instead, activities connected with paid work flowed into the family's domestic life. Even where workers had to go out to the fields, the only indications of time were the height of the sun, sundials (dependent on the sun shining), or the occasional public clock (many clocks had no faces and just chimed the hours and quarters; those that had faces normally had only one hand – see Figure 5.2). Where there was no clock, time (notably to let people know when church services were) was measured by an hour glass and marked by someone ringing church bells. The timing of work during the day was often dependent on the availability of light: weavers' cottages in the former cloth-manufacturing districts of

Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire can be identified by their rows of windows (see Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.3 Lower Shaw Booth Farm, Wainstalls, Halifax. This building was constructed in the seventeenth century as a yeoman's house. The large mullioned windows enabled sufficient light for domestic weaving. Photo: Historic England. © Crown copyright.HE

Until E. P. Thompson's ground-breaking article of 1967, 'Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism', the history of timekeeping had been chiefly tied to the history of clocks and their makers, though social anthropologists had studied different understandings of time in the distant societies on which they usually worked. Thompson applied these ideas to England.

Online session 5.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 5.1. This should take around 45 minutes.

You can see that working when time is measured by the need to perform tasks and the opportunity (daylight, weather, distance to travel and so on) to do so creates a different way of thinking about the relationship between work and time. We saw in the lists of wage rates in Reading 5.1 how some tasks were seen as day-long tasks, while others were to be performed during a year and still others as the occasion arose.

Another point I'd make about the article you read in online session 5.1 is that Thompson drew on studies in anthropology and what we would call ethnology. Commonly, parallels between the early modern world and the modern developing world are difficult to sustain, but you can see how Thompson drew on studies of the Nandi and the Aran Islands to understand different modes of timekeeping.

Locations of work

You will remember from your work on 'Households, families and populations: counting the people of early modern Europe' (Chapter 3) that households were not only places where people ate and slept, but workplaces too. The household was where the labour for the family business resided and often included servants and apprentices as well as family members. Since much manufacture took place in households, the occupational designation of the head of the household actually meant that members of the household, both family members and employees, often worked in the same trade even if they were not identified in that way.

The high cost of transport frequently determined what types of work were undertaken in households in different locations. Workplaces tended to be near the raw materials they needed. So wool-spinning, weaving and knitting took place in regions where sheep were bred; wine was made at vineyards; flax and woad were processed in the places (such as Lincolnshire and Brittany) where they were grown; iron goods were manufactured in places where there was iron ore and wood for smelting, and so on. Transport costs also made it economic to manufacture goods and products on a very small scale, so brewing was not carried out in centralised breweries but in individual households. Alehouses usually brewed their own beer and ale.

Exercise 5.4

Turn to Steve Hindle, 'Rural society' and Penny Roberts, 'Urban society' in the set book and read pages 48–66. You don't need to read the chapters in detail.

Identify the principal kinds of work in countryside and town.

This should take around an hour.

Discussion

I've identified the following:

Rural: cereal (wheat and barley) farming; viticulture; grazing; market gardening; growing various more specialised crops such as olives, maize and potatoes; processing agricultural produce (milling corn; making wine); pressing olives; tanning hides; spinning and weaving; processing dairy products.

Urban: weaving; shoemaking; baking; smithing; agricultural work.

You will have noted before that what might be called industry was often carried out in the countryside, close to sites of production. Equally, some apparently rural occupations, such as market gardening, were carried out in towns, to ensure a supply of fresh foodstuffs. Thinking back to Readings 5.1 and 5.2, you can see that the differences between the Bedfordshire countryside and the urban occupations of Norwich are not completely clear-cut: spinning took place in town and country and many townspeople worked in agriculture.

Work in the countryside

Farmers who held a lease on land, paid cash rents or owned freehold land could keep what livestock they chose; they could grow what crops they chose and experiment with new ones; they could improve the land by fertilising it and draining it; they could raise cash by selling what they grew or bred; and they could borrow money on the security of the land. People who did not rent or own land often had rights to use land, or to harvest its produce. For example, rights to common grazing were very important, especially for people who wanted to keep a cow, a horse or a few sheep but had no land. Gleaning (gathering stalks of corn after a field had been harvested by scything) was an important

source of grain for poorer people. In some regions there were rights to gather wood for fuel from woodlands. Landlords of free tenancies could, however, place restrictions on their tenants, for example reserving to themselves all ‘furred and feathered game’ (deer, hares, pheasants, partridges, woodcock and so on) or the right to fish from waterways running through their property.

Many different types of agriculture were carried out across early modern Europe, requiring different patterns of work. Some farmers grew crops; others grazed animals. There were other, more specialised forms of agriculture too, involving vineyards, woad (for dye), horticulture, market gardening, orchards, flax (for linen), cork and forestry. Different forms of agriculture called on different parts of the workforce. Few forms of agriculture offered year-round work for women, except for dairying in pastoral regions. However, Sheilagh Ogilvie’s study of a region in the Black Forest suggests that there the gender division of labour was more flexible than one might suppose from the writings of moralists who recommended female domesticity: although women did much of the domestic work, they also carried out a third of the agricultural work (Ogilvie, 2003, p. 321). We shall look more closely at the gender division of labour in section 5.4.

A good many activities which today would be called industrial were associated with agriculture, either as a by-activity in periods when farm work was not required, or because of the location of raw materials that had to be processed, such as wool, wood or mineral deposits. An example of the close relationship between industry and agriculture can be seen in the fertile region of Caux in Normandy. Here there had long been arable farming on large farms that employed men, women and children seasonally and provided urban markets with grain sent out from the nearby port of Rouen. Off-season agricultural jobs were carried out by men, while women spun thread to supply male weavers (one weaver required the output of ten spinners) – in the early eighteenth century more women than men worked in textiles, but during that century power-driven spinning machines reduced the work for women. At the same time root crops were introduced, which meant more year-round agricultural work for men because there was no need to leave the ground fallow at intervals, as was necessary with growing grain. Demand for hand-woven cloth was met by women becoming weavers (Gullickson, 1986, pp. 196–9).

Work in town

Now that more than half of the world's population lives in towns and cities, much work is located in an urban setting. In early modern Europe, only some work was closely associated with towns. Urban areas were essential for the exchange of goods and for some crafts: banking and goldsmithing, for instance, were not rural activities. But many forms of manufacture widely regarded today as urban (the production of linen and woollen cloth, for example) took place in the countryside and were carried out alongside agriculture.

From the early Middle Ages, town crafts began to be regulated by guilds or craft companies. These institutions were originally founded to protect the interests of craftsmen against those of the town authorities, but increasingly guildsmen were elected to serve as the town authorities, creating a small ruling group or **oligarchy**. Guilds and town councils governed who could and could not work in towns, and also how they worked. Some measures, such as the control of weights and measures and the regulation of the purity of goods, were in the interests of consumers. Others were in the interests of the workforce, such as the control of apprenticeships. Regulations controlling when and where markets could take place and who could trade at them were partly in the interests of traders, but were also public order measures. Many of the regulations were primarily in the interests of craftsmen. The value of guilds to craftsmen can be seen by the fact that new trades and processes founded their own guilds, such as the guild of framework-knitters established in London and Westminster in 1663 (Smith, 1963, p. cxviii).

Guild ordinances, however, were like the prescriptive writings about the family you read in 'Households, families and populations: counting the people of early modern Europe' (Chapter 3): a counsel of what should have happened rather than a description of what did happen. Penalties for infringement were usually applied by the officers appointed for the purpose by the guild. Regulations typically concerned the government of the guild by a master and wardens, and levies to be paid by the master craftsmen who made up its members. Important regulations concerned the taking on of apprentices and their fair treatment (and the fair treatment of the master craftsman if an apprentice behaved badly or absconded). Terms of apprenticeships normally ran for seven years on the payment of a premium, and membership of the guild was attained by completing an apprenticeship,

by marriage to the widow of a guild member, or by inheritance from a father.

Some guilds allowed women members, but normally only if they were daughters or widows of members. In part this was to do with ensuring that a business that had apprentices and debts did not collapse at the death of the master. Many widows continued to run their late husbands' businesses, but for a limited number of years. Mrs Mary Drinkwater, widow of Alderman Drinkwater of Dublin and member of the Dublin Guild of Merchants, had four apprentices between 1663 and 1673 (Berry, 1900, p. 59). Marjorie Carll was made a freewoman of Old Aberdeen (with citizen's rights equivalent to those of a master craftsman) to permit her to trade in the city in 1640 (see extract from the Council Minute Book 30 June 1640). To carry on business in most towns tradespeople had either to be freemen of the borough (boroughs were incorporated by royal charter and elected MPs to parliament) who were enfranchised to vote in civic elections, or members of trades guilds (many of whose senior and richer members were also freemen of the borough).

Extract from the Council Minute Book 30 June 1640

<i>Original</i>	<i>Translation</i>
We Provost and baillies of the Citie of Auld Aberdein be thir presentis admitis Meriorie Carll Inhabitant in the said Citie fre woman in all tymes cuming to use the tred of huxtar by and sell all such wairis as hes bein in use to be boucht and sauld be ony of the said tred lauchtfullie abefoir bye this our writt and subscrywit with our handis.	We provost and magistrates of the city of Old Aberdeen by these present admit Marjorie Carll inhabitant in the said city freewoman in all times coming to use the trade of huckster [a retailer of small goods in a stall or booth], buy and sell all such wares as has been in use to be bought and sold by any of the said trade lawfully formerly by this our writ and subscribed by our hands.

(Munro, 1909, p. 68)

On the whole, guilds operated to the benefit of men rather than of women, even in trades such as victualling and the needle trades in which many women worked. In Rome in 1737 master tailors and journeymen united to complain about the numbers of women working as seamstresses (Groppi, 1986, p. 381). In the Black Forest (where

there were both urban and rural guilds) women did not work in the crafts governed by guilds (Ogilvie, 2003, p. 322). Women were more likely to be treated favourably by the guilds if there was a labour shortage.

5.4 Who ‘worked’?

Age, disability and work

In early modern Europe people worked when they had to earn a living or to contribute towards the income of a household. There were no rules about when children might start work, nor were there any rules about when adults might finish work. Without old age pensions many people had to work as long as they could, often changing occupations as their strength and faculties declined. People with disabilities were frequently accommodated in particular kinds of work or apprenticeships. The Norwich Census of the Poor identifies a number of people who were ‘lame’ (the term was often used to mean incapacitated rather than having difficulty walking) and the work they did. Children with disabilities might be found apprenticeships appropriate to their abilities, though masters might exact a price for accommodating such children. We will return to children’s work shortly.

You’ll remember from Reading 5.2 that there was a record of a woman of 70 years old working. Also in Norwich, 80-year-old Alyce Colten span white warp, while Agnes Acres was still spinning webbing at the same age (Pound, 1971, pp. 36, 41). It is striking that in the Norwich census of 1570 few of the men over the age of 60 had occupations, though reference was usually made to their former craft or trade.

Adults

Discussion of work and the economy is often posited on the idea that work was carried out by a male head of household who was paid for this and provided the main income. In the case of law, medicine, government office and Protestant clergy in early modern Europe this was an appropriate model, since women were excluded from practising these professions. But in the case of many trades, crafts and agricultural work the contribution of women and children was a significant part of the household’s earning capacity.

In the words of Mary Prior, ‘The division of labour between the sexes was efficient and inequitable ... The realm of work was ... divided into two parts. What men did was definite, well-defined, limited. ... What the women did was everything else. ... So the realm of work was

divided without residue' (Prior, 1985, p. 95). Olwen Hufton has talked about women's work being dominated by the 'economy of makeshifts', that is to say that women took any work they could find to fit their circumstances (Hufton, 1995, p. 495). It would be fair to say that Hufton's description fitted the lives of poor people of both sexes dependent on unskilled seasonal and occasional work.

One of the subjects in early modern history in which research is increasing is women's work: some of this is referred to in Bernard Capp's chapter, 'Gender and family' in the set book (pp. 37–47). This research has been of much greater value than simply to illuminate how women were part of the economic life of early modern societies. Ogilvie's study of the Württemberg Black Forest for the period 1580–1800 concludes that 'women were active in both household and market, but ... their activity fluctuated in response to demographic, economic, and institutional [government and guild] restraints' (Ogilvie, 2003, p. 335). Women in Germany, as in other countries, were able to adapt to new tasks or labour conditions, but they were also vulnerable to exclusion from the more profitable trades at the will of male governments and guilds. German guilds limited the earnings of maidservants, female day labourers, spinners and seamstresses (Ogilvie, 2003, p. 347). But the picture was not uniform across Europe; Dutch guilds allowed maidservants to work in crafts, for example (Ogilvie, 2003, p. 345). However, women working in crafts in the Netherlands were never able to be full guild members, though trade guilds (less widespread and less exclusive than craft guilds) welcomed women members (van den Heuvel, 2007, p. 24). These restrictions forced women to move into unregulated, informal and often less well-paid occupations, such as selling small goods, food and drink.

Exercise 5.5

Now turn to Bernard Capp, 'Gender and family' in the set book, and read the section on 'Work' on pages 39–40. What, in Capp's view, characterised women's work, and how did it change?

This should take around 10–15 minutes.

Discussion

Capp exemplifies Prior's remark on the division of labour quoted above. Note the phrases 'help', 'farmer's wife', 'working alongside'. The majority of women's work was concerned with household tasks and childcare, either paid or unpaid. Much women's work was dependent: that is to say that women frequently worked in occupations where they were dependent on an employer, often living in the employer's household.

Capp suggests that women's capacity to operate as independent trades- or craftspeople declined as guilds increasingly restricted what women might do, forcing them into lower-paid, unregulated occupations. He also notes the limitations on what women might do because of lack of strength and repeated pregnancies. He discusses the ways in which households operated as economic units and used the labour of everyone.

The gender division of labour, or occupational segregation, has been a cornerstone of our understanding of early modern economies. We have already seen, in the discussion of Burnette's work, that this is still a contested subject among historians.

Children

Just as there were no general rules about when people should retire, there were no regulations on when children joined the workforce. People worked if they needed to and were able to. Children's work in the period of the Industrial Revolution has been better studied than their work in the early modern period, but there is no doubt that young people formed a significant part of the working population. The age at which they started work varied, but the Norwich Census of the Poor of 1570 records girls aged seven who 'knytt & spyn', 'pyk wolle' and 'weve lace', children as young as five employed in spinning, and a group of brothers and sisters aged twelve, ten, eight and five years who 'weave & knytt' (Pound, 1971, pp. 40, 42). This source shows few very young boys working (though a number who went to school, often intermittently), but children of both sexes were employed in the countryside to scare birds and weed crops. Children's work, unlike that of many adults, was completely unregulated: there were no set rates of pay or hours. The Bedfordshire wage assessment (Reading 5.1)

specifies rates of pay for servants and apprentices over and under the age of 18; a similar listing for Northamptonshire for 1667 specifies those for servants aged over 16 (Putnam, 1927, p. 133). In neither instance is a minimum age mentioned.

A study of children employed in the Netherlands shows that the poorer the family, the earlier their children started work: orphans started earlier than those with parents; the children of people receiving alms started later than orphans, but earlier than those with parents who were not receiving alms (Meerkerk and Schmidt, 2008, pp. 720–2). Orphans were put to silk-weaving at the age of seven years; children who had both parents and who were not dependent on poor relief seem to have started work at the age of 12–14 years. Unlike the Norwich children, we find boys in Dutch towns employed in spinning, but the age at which they started work, as in Norwich, was slightly later than the age at which girls began. In the Netherlands the age at which children started work seems to have increased in the eighteenth century with the greater availability of education.

It was common practice to send children away to someone else's household for a number of years. In noble families this involved sending young sons and daughters to learn the ways of noble life in another family; for the children of tradespeople and farmers it involved sending children to another household to learn a trade in whose business the child was to be trained; for the children of people receiving poor relief it meant working in another household so that they did not need to be supported by the parish.

Children made up a substantial part of the total working population; apprentices may have accounted for as much as 7.5–10 per cent of the English workforce (Humphries, 2001, p. 81). Apprenticeship was certainly a useful device for training and preparing young people for work in trades and commerce, but it could also be a way of exploiting young people's cheap labour. Apprentices taken into skilled and profitable occupations such as goldsmiths and apothecaries had to pay high premiums (Lane, 1996, p. 13). In return, masters (normally men, occasionally women) undertook, apart from training the young person in his or her trade, to feed, clothe and house them and often to teach them extra skills such as reading (there was no compulsory schooling until the nineteenth century). Girls were much less likely to be apprenticed; when they were, it was usually for shorter periods than the seven years of a conventional male apprenticeship.

Pauper children were often apprenticed in the less skilled and less healthy trades, which tended to stigmatise these occupations and so deter more respectable entrants. Brickmaking, hatmaking, chimney-sweeping and the forms of clothmaking that offered poor career prospects had many pauper apprentices (Lane, 1996, p. 83). Parish officials who arranged such apprenticeships also tended to choose these trades for sickly or disabled children, their primary desire being to transfer the cost of the children's upkeep from the parish to an employer. Overseers of the poor were known to fine unwilling tradespeople for not taking on pauper children and there was little supervision of the use made by masters of such children. Poor children placed in apprenticeships by charities fared much better, because such charities were usually endowed for the support of orphans and often had a connection with the late father's trade or with the parish in which he had carried out his trade.

5.5 Researching the nature of work in pre-industrial economies

We have very few first-hand accounts or illustrations of what people did during the day to earn their livings, what tasks they performed, when they took breaks, how often they were working alone or with other people, their association with other people working at the same trade or occupation, and their relations with people in allied trades or with whom they did business. Printers and engravers were rather more likely than other occupations to produce images of themselves as they had the means to do so (Figures 5.4 and 5.5). We know surprisingly little about the workers in the occupations that employed the largest numbers of people: housework, domestic service and agricultural work.

Official documents such as tax listings, court papers and wills often identify men by their occupations (smith, weaver, clergyman, dyer, merchant and so on) and can give us some information about work, but women are almost always identified by their married status (spinster, wife, widow) rather than by their occupation. One reason why the Norwich Census of the Poor, an extract from which you looked at earlier (as Reading 5.2), is such an unusual document is that it gives information about people who wouldn't normally have been given formal occupational designations, especially women and children.

Furthermore, occupational designations in no way describe the range of work, paid or unpaid, that people did. For example, many people must have spent a great deal of time carrying water from a well for domestic use, yet we rarely see anyone described as a water carrier. Some occupational designations also have implications for status, for example yeoman, husbandman, clerk (meaning clergyman) and membership of trades that implied belonging to a guild.

Many documents, such as court depositions and spiritual autobiographies, describe people's activity and how their time was filled by tasks. Historians (notably Ogilvie in her research on Germany; Ogilvie, 2003) have used such sources to try to uncover the nature of work for those in the population whose work cannot readily be described by the usual occupational designations. Ogilvie's work shows that in early modern Germany the sexual division of labour was more flexible than occupational listings would suggest, with their emphasis on female domesticity.

Der Formschneider.



Figure 5.4 Jost Amman, 'Der Formschneider' (the wood-block cutter), woodcut, from *Eygentliche Beschreibung aller Stände auff Erden* ('The Book of Trades'), 1568, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Each image from the book contained a poem by Hans Sachs. Photo: akg-images/Imagno/Austrian Archives.

Der Brieffmaler.

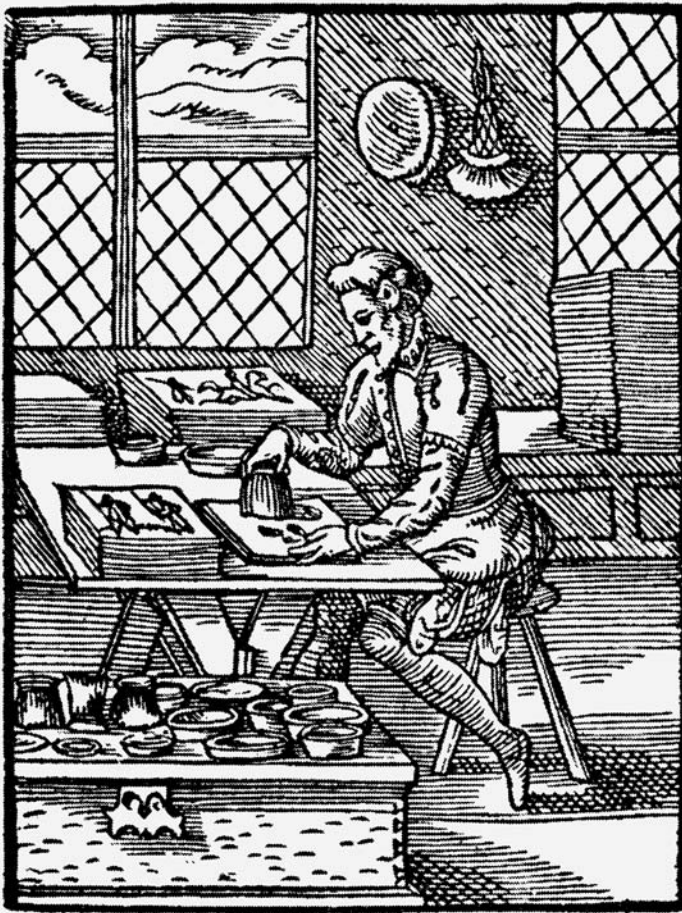


Figure 5.5 Jost Amman, 'Der Brieffmaler' (the picture or card maker), woodcut, from *Eygentliche Beschreibung aller Stände auff Erden* (The Book of Trades), 1568, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Each image from the book contained a poem by Hans Sachs. Photo: akg-images/Imagno/Austrian Archives.

Probate inventories listed and valued the possessions of someone who had died. They included household goods, rated at their second-hand sale value. These inventories did not list land or buildings owned by the deceased, but leases and debts owed to the deceased did appear. Also not included were the personal possessions of a man's wife and heirlooms (possessions of importance to the family and intended to remain with them).

The documents you will read in exercise 5.6 and online session 5.2 illustrate how historians use unlikely sources to try to uncover more of the detail of people's work and daily lives.

Exercise 5.6

Turn to Reading 5.3, 'Probate inventory of Thomas Raynebeard', 1638, located at the end of the chapter. What do the objects listed in Raynebeard's house tell us about work there?

(In the seventeenth century the letters I and J were often used interchangeably. TH was often represented by Y which approximated to the Old English letter þ (thorn) which is sounded as TH (hence Ye Olde Teashop is in fact The Olde Teashop). Roxwell is a village near Chelmsford.)

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

We know from the first paragraph of the document that Raynebeard was a weaver and we find in the (work)shop three old looms and the implements belonging to them. The number of looms suggests that more than one person was working as a weaver there. It appears that the workshop was unheated, as there is no reference to fire implements. Nor is there any reference to thread or finished cloth from the looms: perhaps Raynebeard had stopped weaving through illness or infirmity. In addition there was a cow, a bullock, a pig and hay: these animals were valuable and some members of the household would have spent some time looking after them.

Judging by its contents, as listed in Reading 5.3, Raynebeard's hall was used for cooking and eating in. In the parlour and the chamber over the hall there were beds and bedding (it seems likely that several

people slept in each room), and valuable or breakable objects (pewter, dishes and glass) were kept in the parlour. In the buttery was a trough for kneading dough and vessels to contain water. The household linen and Raynebeard's clothes (presumably kept in the press in the parlour) were listed separately because of their high value.

The high value attributed to Raynebeard's household textiles suggests that they were to be passed on to his heirs for use. Remaking and recycling a wide variety of goods were important activities, but are rarely represented in descriptions of early modern work. There was a thriving market in second-hand goods, especially textiles, which were often altered in the case of clothing or, in the case of other kinds of fabric, made into something else. After the Reformation in England the elaborate vestments worn by priests on religious feast days were turned into altar frontals while Lenten veils, used to drape statues of Christ during the week before Easter, were made into coverings for the tops of altars. Paper was made from worn-out cloth and building materials were reused.

Online session 5.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 5.2. This should take around an hour and a half.

It is from documents such as these that we study the topic of work in the early modern period. As you can see, to understand how someone (usually a man) supported his family, it isn't enough to say that he had a particular trade. It's necessary to look at what other people in the household did, how they spent their time and how their activity was regulated by external factors such as officially set wage rates and market regulation.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated what people did to earn their livings and to carry out the tasks necessary for daily life, and has provided a picture of the people who did those things. It has shown how we use documents in different ways to learn about work. Economists like to imagine that the early modern period was the dawn of the free market of unregulated capitalism, with wage rates, interest rates and exchange rates finding their own levels, with free competition in trade, and with businesses surviving or going to the wall according to demand. As you have seen, early modern economies were highly regulated. Wage rates were set and markets and fairs (often used for hiring staff as well as for buying and selling) managed by local governments; the professions were protected by powerful corporate bodies. Urban guilds engaged in restrictive practices, controlling who might enter and practise trades and the location and conditions in which they might be carried on. Work was prohibited on many days of the year (on Sundays and religious feast days such as Easter, saints' days and civic festivals).

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Willan, T. S. (1947) 'A Bedfordshire wage assessment of 1684',
Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, vol. 25, pp. 129–37.

Readings

Reading 5.1 ‘A Bedfordshire wage assessment of 1684’

Source: Willan, T.S. (1947) ‘A Bedfordshire wage assessment of 1684’, *The Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society*, vol. 25, Streatley, BHRS, pp. 135–7.

The rates of wages of all manner of artificers, labourers and servants as well by the day with meat and drink, and without, as also by the whole year, and in gross, made and set forth at the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace held at Bedford for the county of Bedford on Wednesday 9 April 1684.

	Day [rate] from mid March to mid September				Day [rate] from mid September to mid March			
	With meat and drink		Without		With meat and drink		Without	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
A master freemason	1	4	1	8	1	0	1	4
A master rough mason		9	1	4		6	1	0
Servants and apprentices above 18 and having served 2 years		8	1	0		6		10
Under 18		3		6		2		4
A joyner	1	4	1	8	1	0	1	4
Servants and apprentices above 18 and having served 2 years	1	0	1	4		8	1	0
Under 18		5		9		2		4
Master carpenter		10	1	4		8	1	0
Journeyman and servants above 18 having served above 2 years		8	1	0		6		10
Under 18		3		6		2		4
Master bricklayer, tyler and plaisterer	1	0	1	4		8	1	0
Servants and apprentices above 18 having served 2 years		5		9		3		6

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Under 18		3		6		2		4
Thatcher		11	1	3		8	1	0
Thresher and labourers except harvest		5		9		4		8
Gardeners	1	0	1	6		10	1	0
Men haymakers		6		10				
Women haymakers		3		6				
Weeders of corn		3		6				
Mowers of corn	1	2	1	6				
Mowers of grass		10	1	2				
Men reapers	1	2	1	6				
Women reapers		6		10				
A taylor		6						
Servants above 18		4						
By the year								
					£	s.	d.	
Bailiff of husbandry taking charge to discharge the same					5	10	0	
A chief hind [servant], best plowman or carter					5	0	0	
Second sort of them					3	10	0	
Best woman cook					2	5	0	
Second woman servant					2	0	0	
Dairy or wash maid					2	0	0	
Chamber maid					2	0	0	
Servingman, coachman, butler or groom with a livery					3	10	0	
Without a livery					4	10	0	
By the great [ie by the task, piecework] without meat and drink								
						s.	d.	
Mowing an acre of upland grass						1	4	
In the meadow						1	0	
Reaping, binding and shocking [stacking sheaves] an acre of wheat or rye						3	4	
Mowing an acre of barley or oats							9	
Mowing, cocking [stacking] and dragging [raking?] the same						1	4	
Binding and shocking an acre of wheat or rye							6	
Dragging and cocking an acre of barley or oats							6	

[p.137]

Mowing, gleaning, dragging and cocking an acre of beans or pease		1	8
Mowing the same		1	0
Cocking, dragging and gleaning the same			10
Making a new ditch 4 foot wide, 3 foot deep, double sett with quick[thorn], and gathering setts for the same at the rate of 16 foot $\frac{1}{2}$ the pole [a pole=16 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet]		1	0
Plashing [bending stems to make a thicker hedge] and hedging every rood of quick			2
Scouring ditches, every pole			2
Every pole of an usual ditch, stuff laid by			2
Making faggots by the hundred			9
Broom or furze faggots			4
Sawing board by the hundred		2	0
Plank by the hundred		2	6
Sliving [splitting] lath by the hundred			3 $\frac{1}{2}$
Making a new plough, [with] meat and drink		1	0
Making a pair of cart wheels		5	6
Digging of earth, striking and burning every 1000 of bricks, with meat and drink, having straw and other necessities		4	0

Reading 5.2 *The Norwich Census of the Poor 1570*

Source: Pound, J.F. (ed.) (1971) *The Norwich Census of the Poor 1570*, Norfolk Record Society, vol. 40, pp. 33.

BEARE STREET [WARD]

[parish of] St. Johns in the hyll

Roger Mason of 56 yeris, a taylor that worke, & Elizabeth his wyfe, of 38 yeris, that spyn white warpe; & 1 daughter of 6 yeris that is idle. He hath dwelt here 32 yeris. [hable]

N. Freemans house. 3d a weke. Indeferent.

Richard Smyth of 30 yeris that gather coni [rabbit] skins & is abrode, & Margaret, his wyf, that make buttons & strynges etc; & a son of 8 yeres that go to skole at tymes, & have dwelt her 8 yere. [hable]

Thorntons house. 3d a weke. Indeferent.

John Sewel of 50 yeris, cobler, that hath no worke, & Elizabeth, his wyfe, of 70 yeris, that spyn white warp; & a daughter of 13 yeris, that spyn white warpe, & hath dwelt here this 10 yeres, & came from Bongeeye.

Thorntons house. 3d a weke. Very pore.

Alyce Hanligh of 70 yere, wedow, & dwelt here 7 yer.

3d a weke.

Reading 5.3 'Probate inventory of Thomas Raynebeard', 1638

Source: Steer, F. (ed.) (1969) *Farm and Cottage Inventories of Mid-Essex 1635–1749*, 2nd edn, Chichester, Phillimore, p. 81.

An Inventory of all the goodes moveables and Chattels of Thomas Raynebeard late of Roxwell in the County of Essex Weaver late Deceased taken & prysed the xxviiith Day of January Anno Domini 1638 by Reginald Sumpner Frances Purkas & Henry Pavett as followeth:

IN THE HALL—One Table & a frame; 2 Formes, two little ioyne stooles [jointed stooles], the bench & bench board; one little playne table, one fyre shovil, a payer of tongs, two Cobyrons [irons to support a spit], 2 pothookes, one payer of Bellowes, the painted Clothes [possibly cloth wall hangings painted to look like tapestry] with other ymplements prised at £1:13s:4d.

IN THE PARLOUR—One halfe headded bed stead, one old Feather bed with stript feathers, one boulder, one pillow, 2 blanketts, one Coverlett at £2; one presse Cupboard, 13s:4d; 20lbs weight of pewter, 6s:8d; 3 earthen Dishes & 3 glasses at 1s; one ioyne Chest & 2 plaine chests, one Chayer with other ymplements in y^e Parlour, 13s:3d.

IN THE CHAMBER OVER YE HALL—One plaine bedstead, one Flockbed, one boulder, one pillow, 2 blanketts, with other ymplements at £1.

IN THE BUTTERY—Two little barrells, one Kneading troffe, two little Tubs, one little troffe, the shelves with other ymplements at £1.

THE BRASSE—Three Kettles, one little brasse pot, one little postnett [small metal pot for boiling with handle and three feet], one frying pan, one gridiorn at £1:10s.

IN THE SHOP—Three old Loomes with all other ymplements belonging to them at £5:10s.

One old Cowe and & bullock at £5.

One Pigg & the Hay, £1.

LINNEN—3 payer of sheets, 4 pillowbeeres [pillow case], 4 table napkins; one table Cloth, 2 small towells £1.

His wearing apparrell, £1:6s:8d.

Sum' is—£22:14s:4d.

Chapter 6 Living in poverty and life on the margins

Brodie Waddell

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the nature of poverty in early modern Europe and the changing ways in which it was addressed
- recognise that the experience of poverty varied across different countries and in different times
- appreciate how different sources can provide contrasting perspectives on the lives of the poor.

Introduction

This chapter will introduce you to the poor of early modern Europe. As we shall see, they were a large and diverse group, ranging from elderly widows to famine-starved families to threatening young men. Their rulers saw some as helpless victims who deserved sympathy and aid, but they viewed the able-bodied poor with great suspicion. As a result, the authorities attempted to use both relief and punishment to deal with the poor. Rising levels of poverty and the spread of new ideas led to communities across Europe passing new laws, establishing new welfare schemes and building new institutions. The best known of these initiatives was the parish-based poor relief system enacted in England and Wales by the ‘Old Poor Law’ (1598–1834).

From the perspective of the poor themselves, the changes were less dramatic. Age, illness, war and food shortages continued to be the primary causes of poverty. They responded to these threats with a broad range of strategies including seeking support from friends and family, drawing on credit, migrating in search of work, or resorting to petty crime. They also sought formal aid from local charities and government officials, but this rarely provided enough income to survive. The chapter will show you how people’s attitudes towards poverty and the strategies they used to fight it were very different depending on their period, their location and their place in society. Different viewpoints – as captured in different sorts of sources – often led to divergent understandings of need and entitlement.

6.1 Who were the poor?

Most people in early modern society knew poverty well. If they were lucky, they felt the pinch of hardship only occasionally and managed to avoid falling into total destitution. If they were unlucky, they might be born into a family already living on the margins, or they might live reasonably well for years only to suffer one of the many common calamities that brought deep poverty in their wake. Even wealthy individuals such as nobles and merchants knew that a political upheaval or a disastrous investment could send them slipping to the bottom of the social ladder.

‘The poor’ was a term that could encompass a very large proportion of the population at this time. Like today, it included the relatively small group of people who were totally dependent on charity or public aid for their subsistence. However, the poor also included many ordinary people such as labourers and artisans and their families, who could support themselves in good times but would have to resort to begging, crime or other expedients when misfortune struck.

So, who were the poor and how did they find themselves in poverty?

Long-term poverty

Some people spent many years, or even their whole lives, in a state of severe destitution. Young orphans and abandoned children had no means to support themselves. Many individuals fell into poverty due to a disability such as blindness, lame limbs or insanity. Such disabilities might have been there from birth, or might be a result of an accident or – perhaps most commonly – old age. Certain diseases, such as the pox (syphilis), incapacitated and impoverished thousands. According to one observer, if you walked through the Hospital of the Holy Spirit in sixteenth-century Copenhagen:

you will see how many poor alms-receivers lie in these beds from all over Zealand [in Denmark], whose noses, eyes and mouths have been eaten away by the pox, and whose arms and legs have rotten away through cancer and pain and still rot by worms and maggots, none of whom will ever be cured.

(Quoted in Grell, 1997, p. 59)

The incessant wars of this period also left many maimed soldiers and sailors. Perhaps most common of all were widows and abandoned wives, who were very prone to poverty. Although some widows thrived after the deaths of their husbands, for others – especially those with little to inherit except full responsibility for young children – the loss of the family's main wage-earner was enough to totally impoverish them. For example, after a Danish noblewoman named Johanne Kass lost her husband in 1632, she wrote that she suffered not only 'grief and sickness' but also 'loss of worldly possessions', leaving her with little more than a 'piece of bread' (quoted in Chojnacka and Wiesner-Hanks, 2002, pp. 274–5).

Those who found themselves in long-term poverty were usually seen in a relatively positive light. It is difficult to know how they thought about their own position in society, but when they described themselves to potential benefactors they frequently emphasised their own helplessness and dependency. Some who had recently fallen on hard times noted that they had previously contributed to their communities as workers, or even through their own charity. However, even in these cases paupers presented an image of themselves as now totally dependent on support from others.

Such 'helpless' individuals tended to be seen with sympathy by those around them. The Bible made it very clear that widows, orphans and 'the halt and lame' were 'God's poor' and so ought to be treated with compassion. Both Protestant and Catholic clergymen frequently reinforced this view, preaching that these sorts of poor people were especially deserving of mercy and charity. Protestant preachers declared that the 'impotent' poor – such as those suffering old age or sickness – should take priority. Similarly, in the seventeenth century the Catholic priest Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) wrote of the importance of aiding orphaned infants because they had 'no father but God' (Pullan, 1994, ch. 3, p. 6). Not only did their clear physical weakness make them less threatening, these people also benefited from the sympathy or, to use their term, 'pity' promoted by the church.

In the Bible, Jesus told his disciples the story of a rich man and a beggar. The sickly beggar died and was carried to heaven by angels, whereas the gluttonous rich man – who refused to give the beggar any charity – was sent to hell. This parable was repeated constantly by early modern preachers and it was often depicted by artists as well. In the 1540s the Italian artist Bonifacio Veronese (1487–1553) painted an image of the scene (Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1 Bonifacio Veronese, *Dives and Lazarus (or Villa Life)*, c.1540, oil on canvas, 204 x 436 cm. Galleria dell' Accademia, Venice. Photo: © De Agostini Picture Library / G.Nimatallah / Bridgeman Images. This painting portrays the biblical parable of Dives, the rich man seated on the left, and Lazarus, the beggar crouching on the right.

Exercise 6.1

Read the following passage from the Bible, study the painting in Figure 6.1 and then answer the questions below.

There was a certain rich man [Dives], which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

(Luke 16:19–31)

- How are Dives (the rich man) and Lazarus (the beggar) depicted in terms of clothing, health, body language and other features?
- How might this story have influenced perceptions of the poor at this time?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

- Dives and Lazarus are depicted very differently. Dives has all the comforts that come with wealth: fine clothes, sumptuous food and a beautiful home. In the painting in Figure 6.1 he is surrounded by family and friends, while listening to music. He is shown as looking

away from Lazarus, perhaps intentionally ignoring him. By contrast, Lazarus is described in the biblical parable as struggling with disease ('full of sores') and is painted with a crutch, which may suggest that he is disabled. He is dressed in rags and is portrayed as half-kneeling, with his hands outstretched towards Dives.

- Those who heard about this parable in sermons or saw it in pictures might have interpreted it in several different ways, but it probably sparked sympathy for the poor among many people. It would have reminded the rich that they had many comforts which the poor lacked and that they should not ignore those who asked for help. However, it also focused sympathy on a specific type of beggar, not all poor people. Lazarus was depicted as helpless, humble and patient. Beggars who were able-bodied, assertive or disorderly were excluded from this sympathetic imagery.
-

There were, however, limits to such tolerance. Even widows, orphans and the disabled rarely received unconditional support. They were expected to embody the virtues of deference, piety and sobriety. In order to be regarded as truly 'deserving', poor people had to be meek and submissive rather than assertive or outspoken. They were supposed to enthusiastically attend church and refrain from vices such as drinking, gambling and sexual immorality. Only those who succeeded in following the restrictive moral code of the age would be seen by their neighbours as 'God's poor'. In 1576, for example, the deacons of Emden in Germany were forbidden to provide aid to anyone who gave 'offence with sin and disgrace' who might 'be bolstered in their depravity with the alms' (Fehler, 1999, p. 249). Similarly, in seventeenth-century Warwickshire a widow named Anne Eales received a pension of sixpence per week, but it was cancelled when she became pregnant by a 'young fellow' and embraced a 'dissolute life' (Hindle, 2004, p. 387). For many poor individuals, meeting such a high moral standard was practically impossible because the cause of their long-term poverty was seen as inherently sinful. Unwed mothers often fell into destitution because their income was restricted at the very moment when their needs grew, but of course they were frequently blamed for their plight. Despite the fact that many maidservants became pregnant only after false promises of marriage or through rape by their master, they still suffered the stigma

associated with unchaste women and thus rarely received much sympathy.

Another group of poor were those who supposedly voluntarily adopted the harsh life of a wandering beggar. Anyone who seemed to choose to beg rather than work was condemned as a **vagrant**. The number of such individuals was small – much smaller than anxious contemporaries assumed – but they did exist. Their ‘foreignness’ made them conspicuous in every town and village that they passed through. Their notoriety meant that complaints about these rogues and vagabonds were common in texts and images of the time, even though they were only a tiny proportion of ‘the poor’. Contemporaries described them as ‘beastly’, ‘promiscuous’ and ‘the very filth and vermin of the commonwealth’ (Slack, 1988, p. 25). Perhaps the most conspicuous of all were the Gypsies, whose dress and customs marked them as outsiders. They left few records of their own, so it is very difficult to know how they saw themselves, but it is clear that most early modern people saw them as thieves and libertines, closer to the devil than to God. Although Catholics may have been slightly more sympathetic to wandering beggars, thanks to the example of the **mendicant friars** – monks who swore vows of poverty and then took to the road – both Protestants and Catholics tended to see vagrancy as a sin.

In 1709 the hack writer Ned Ward (1667–1731) published a satirical pamphlet entitled *The History of the London Clubs*, in which he included ‘The Beggars Club’. This club, he claimed, was for all the beggars of the city who faked injuries or handicaps in order to get charity from passers-by. Although this club was fictional, there were many beggars in London who claimed to have various disabilities and at least a few of them were fraudulent.

Exercise 6.2

Turn to Reading 6.1, Ned Ward, ‘The Beggars Club’, 1709, located at the end of the chapter. What does Ward’s satirical description of the club tell us about elite attitudes to long-term beggars?

(Note: this source includes slang words for various types of beggars (‘clappeldugeon’, ‘mumper’ and so on).)

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Ward's description of the beggars' club is an example of a very negative attitude towards long-term beggars, which was probably shared by many of his well-off readers. In his pamphlet, London beggars are portrayed as fakes and fraudsters who take advantage of people's mistaken sympathy. According to Ward, they pretend to be blind, sick or disabled when on the street, but are actually in 'perfect Health' the whole time. In addition, they are alleged to be prone to drunkenness (they 'soundly liquord their Paunches'), which was considered sinful. The fact that Ward claims they are a 'club' suggests that the beggars are organised and coordinated, rather than isolated and vulnerable.

The extract probably does not tell us much about the actual beggars of eighteenth-century London, because it is a satire rather than an attempt at an objective description of poverty. It can, however, show us what one educated writer and perhaps many of his readers thought of vagrants. For people like Ward, beggars were objects of scorn and ridicule. They were seen as deceptive, sinful and well-organised. If such attitudes were common, it would have made life very difficult for even the most genuine of beggars, because their requests for aid could then be ignored.

The number of people who lived permanently in destitution was never very large. Most of those who fell deeply into poverty though age, injury or the death of a husband had previously lived without assistance for many years. Equally, although orphans and unwed mothers rarely achieved lives of material comfort, many eventually escaped the ranks of the desperately poor by finding stable employment or through marriage.

Estimating the number of people in long-term poverty is extremely difficult. Historians have attempted to piece together figures from a variety of incomplete and inconsistent local surveys and from the financial accounts of various charitable institutions (Table 6.1). The results suggest wide variation between countries and between urban and rural areas, with figures ranging from only one in 50 people in late seventeenth-century Berlin to one in four in early seventeenth-century Trier (Germany). However, if the exceptional cases are discounted, it seems that 5–10 per cent of the population in most communities were forced to rely on charity even in normal years. This is very low by modern standards. By comparison, in 2013 about 30 per cent of all

British families received more than half of their income from state welfare payments such as old age pensions and unemployment benefits (*Guardian*, 2013). As the definition of poverty has changed and Europe's wealth has increased, so too has the range and level of support dedicated to counteracting the effects of poverty.

Table 6.1 Number and proportion of people receiving poor relief in various communities

Place	Year	No. of recipient/ supported households	% of population
<i>Urban communities</i>			
Frankfurt am Main	1539	400	3.6
Trier	1623	324	24.8
Cologne	1799	3,132	8.2
Berlin	1665	280	2.0
Berlin	1799	11,125	7.2
Vitré	1597	949	11.0
Amiens	1625	1,149	3.8
Aix-en-Provence	1760	5,000	20.0
Norwich	1578– 79	381	5.1
Exeter	1691	482	7.2
Salisbury	1725	180	5.1
Venice	1740	?	14.0
Toledo (1 parish)	1573	518	15.6
Antwerp	1773	?	11.0
Brussels	1755	?	7.0
Malines	1794	?	13.0
<i>Rural communities</i>			
Nuremberg district	1700– 10	?	10.0
Zurich district	1590	3,459	4.5
Solothurn district	1768	156	22.5
Kenilworth	1663– 64	31	23.0

Source: Jütte, 1994, p. 54.

Temporary poverty

For every individual who fell permanently into destitution, there were many more who experienced deep poverty only temporarily. As you saw in ‘Work and reward’ (Chapter 5), most of the population were forced to work very hard to earn even a bare subsistence. In rural areas, the vast majority of families were peasants who held only enough land to supply their basic necessities, or landless labourers who had to hire themselves out to their richer neighbours. In the towns, most people could be categorised as the ‘labouring poor’, comprising humble artisans, journeymen and low-paid ‘out-workers’ such as wool-spinners. These people inevitably faced recurrent hard times during their lives, even if such periods lasted only a few weeks or months. The most common causes were failed harvests, diseases, wars, unemployment and having young children.

Agricultural disasters were an all-too-frequent occurrence in early modern Europe. In some cases, only a few people were affected. An unlucky peasant family might wake one morning to discover that their wheat field had been flattened by hail, or their sheep flock infected with disease. Such events could easily push a farmer into poverty that might take years to escape. Moreover, early modern agriculture was also prone to much wider catastrophes. At least once a decade severe weather would ruin crops, leading to shortages of grain – the staple food for nearly everyone – and the results were devastating. Peasants who could scrape by in most years faced the possibility of outright starvation if their crops failed, especially if the whole region was similarly affected. During the Scottish famine of the 1690s, the physician Sir Robert Sibbald (1641–1722) reported that

the bad seasons these several years past hath made so much scarcity and so great dearth, that for want, some die by the way-side, some drop down on the streets, the poor babes are starving for want of milk, which the empty breasts of their mothers cannot furnish them. Everyone may see death in the face of the poor which abound everywhere ... [It is] not only the common wandering beggars ..., but many house-keepers who lived well by their labour and industry ... now by want forced to abandon their dwellings and they and their little ones must beg.

(Quoted in Cullen, 2010, pp. 99–100)

In towns, which could draw on a wider area to supply them with food, starvation was rarer. Instead, for the urban population, local harvest failures caused higher bread prices, which imposed great hardship on the many people who had little money to spare. The labouring poor, who could supply their own needs in most years, were often pushed into poverty and dependency by periods of inflated prices when they discovered that their meagre incomes could not buy them enough food (see Figure 6.2).

Illness was another common threat. Many labouring families had practically no savings, so if treatment for an ailment was costly, or if it took the patient more than a few days to recover, this might reduce a household to the ranks of the impoverished for an extended period. A broken arm, a prolonged fever or a bout of dysentery could easily lead to temporary destitution. Visitations of the plague or other epidemics could cause similar problems on a much larger scale. When such diseases broke out in a town they spread poverty as well as illness: workers who fell ill lost their income and others suffered when trade was curtailed to prevent contagion.

Military conflict in this period always brought heightened poverty. Armies were frequently poorly supplied and undisciplined, so they tended to prey on the civilian populations of the areas through which they moved. For a peasant, the arrival of a band of soldiers could be devastating. Soldiers often seized food and fuel from villages and might sack and burn whole settlements. Labouring families were hardest hit, but even wealthy individuals might find their goods captured or their estates seized by hostile forces during wars. The most famous example is the devastation caused by the 'Thirty Years' War in central Europe (1618–48). One resident of Hanau in Germany described how many years of war 'exhausted and impoverished our whole country', especially the arrival of a garrison in the city 'which will reduce our citizens to poverty' though **exactions** (quoted in Cunningham and Grell, 2000, pp. 195–6).

Unemployment was an obvious cause of poverty. The loss of a job could be a personal tragedy. It could also be part of a community-wide tragedy caused by a natural disaster, an illness or a war. However, unemployment was often caused simply by the nature of the economy itself. Then, as now, the most common cause of unemployment was the endless cycle of booms and busts that afflict every market economy. We cannot pinpoint 'recessions' and 'depressions' as precisely in the early modern period as we can today, but it is clear that they

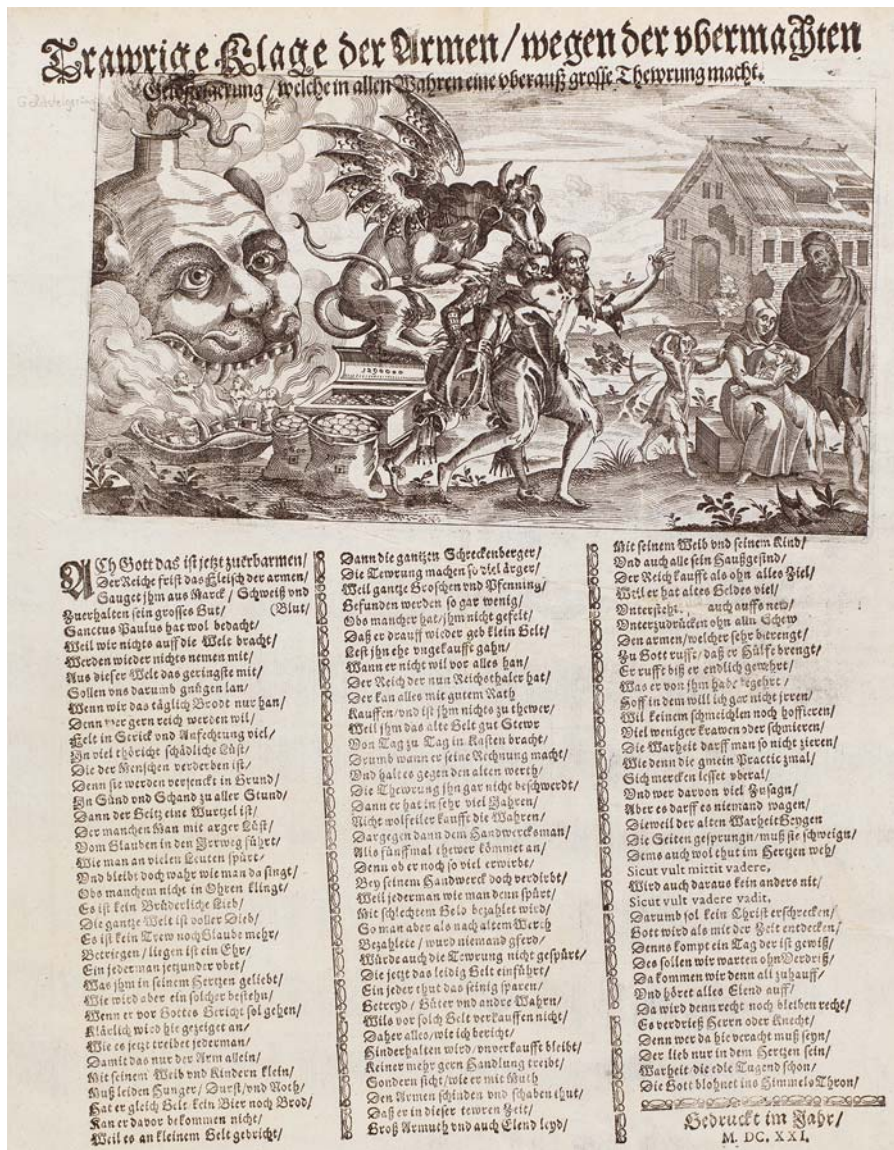


Figure 6.2 The sad complaint of the poor against the domination of inflation, 1621. Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, shelfmark IE 185. In this German image, we see the rising cost of living depicted as a monstrous demon attacking the poor. In the background, inflation is also shown devouring people. This picture dates from the early seventeenth century, a time when the price of necessities had been rising rapidly for many years across most of Europe.

occurred with unpleasant regularity. Harvest and trade cycles meant large groups of people could find themselves suddenly dismissed, leaving them without a regular income. Moreover, most parts of

Europe experienced extended periods of population growth, which meant that the supply of labour frequently outstripped the demand for it. At times, the number of people able and willing to work far exceeded the amount of labour required to maintain the economy, making it impossible for wage-earners to find steady employment.

For many people, temporary poverty was caused as much by a rise in expenses as by a loss of income due to unemployment. As noted above, this could be due to a sudden increase in food prices after a failed harvest. It is also clear that at least a few men and women fell into destitution through excessive spending on alcohol or gambling, though the impact of such ‘sins’ was undoubtedly exaggerated by the clergymen and moralists of the time. Richard Gough, the Shropshire farmer you encountered in online session 1.2 in ‘Early modern Europe: an introduction’ (Chapter 1), bitterly recalled many cases of ‘an idle, drunken, careless husband’ who ‘consumed his estate notwithstanding his wife’s paines, care, and industry’ and left her ‘distitute’ (quoted in Waddell, 2012, p. 100). A much more common cause of temporary poverty was the cost of feeding and caring for small children. Having new mouths to feed could make the difference between self-sufficiency and impoverishment, especially as mothers had to reduce their own employment in order to care for their infants. However, this period of poverty usually lasted only a few years, because children could begin to contribute their labour to the family budget from a fairly young age and mothers could then work again.

Historians refer to this pattern as ‘life-cycle poverty’. When they were first born, infants represented higher expenditures and lower incomes for their parents, which meant that they often spent their early years in poverty. They normally escaped this state as young adults when they were able to earn money and had few expenses, only to return to poverty when they first became parents themselves. The family budget would then gradually improve as children aged and began to work or leave home, but collapsed once again as the couple became too old to work (see Figure 6.3).

Attitudes towards these sorts of poor people varied widely depending on their specific circumstances. There seems to have been plenty of sympathy for those who suffered poverty due to a temporary illness or a natural disaster, for they were just as helpless as an aged widow or a maimed soldier, even if their helplessness was only temporary. However, the able-bodied poor were often neglected at best, or vilified at worst. As noted above, it was sometimes assumed that there were

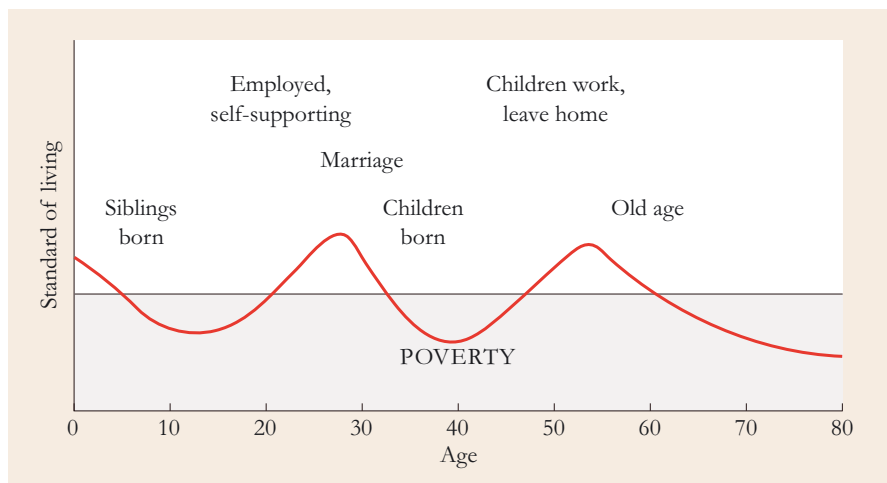


Figure 6.3 The life-cycle of impoverishment, from: *Policing the Poor in Eighteenth-century France* by Robert M. Schwartz. Copyright © 1988 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher. www.uncpress.unc.edu. Here we can see how poverty was concentrated among those who could not work (children and the elderly) and those who had to provide for them (parents of young children).

only two types of poor people: those who were physically *unable* to work and those who were merely *unwilling* to work. Nonetheless, the authorities in some parts of Europe did gradually begin to acknowledge that many people who were capable of labour were temporarily unable – rather than unwilling – to find work. As early as 1516, for example, the **humanist** Thomas More (1478–1535) suggested that many of the needy were peasants thrown off their land by greedy nobles who enclosed their estates and turned them into sheep pastures (**enclosure**). By the late sixteenth century, government officials in England and elsewhere had realised that many labouring people might have a lawful reason for requesting assistance. Nonetheless, the able-bodied poor were perceived much more ambiguously than their impotent counterparts.

The number of people who occasionally fell into poverty was much larger than the 5–10 per cent of the population who were forced to rely on charity for long periods. Due to the lack of any systematic surveys from the time it is impossible to be precise, but contemporary estimates can give some impression of the scale of the problem. In the English town of Norwich 22 per cent of the population were defined as poor in 1570, though less than a quarter of those were receiving formal aid, while in Toledo (Spain) 20 per cent were so defined in 1558 (Jütte, 1994, pp. 56–7). A survey of the poor in the

manufacturing town of Bolton in Lancashire in 1674 provides some indication of the potential impact of short-term factors. In more typical years, about one in eight townspeople there received some form of charity, but in the early 1670s the Third Anglo-Dutch War severely disrupted the local cotton-weaving industry and bad weather ruined the oat harvest. As a result, about one in three people in Bolton – more than double the usual number – were forced to rely on relief in 1674 (Healey, 2014, pp. 224–34). More extreme cases can be found on the continent, where millions died during the famines that recurrently devastated early modern communities. In Finland during a particularly severe food shortage in 1696–97 perhaps as many as 500,000 people died and many more survived only through charity, suggesting that here the number of those who could not support themselves in ‘bad years’ was very high indeed (Parker, 2013, p. 589).

6.2 How did people respond to the threat of poverty?

Just as ‘the poor’ were a very diverse group in early modern society, so too were their responses to the challenge of ‘getting by’. Many people sought to avoid or escape poverty by requesting charity. Others sought out alternative forms of work, some turned to crime, and some took to the streets to protest. Some were forced to try all of these methods merely to survive.

This diverse range of responses to hardship has been labelled ‘an economy of makeshifts’ by Olwen Hufton in her book on the poor in eighteenth-century France (Hufton, 1974). The phrase has come to be used extensively by historians because it neatly encapsulates the fact that the poor could not rely on automatic support from a single source such as a modern welfare system, so they were compelled to seek out income from a variety of different sources. The miscellaneous nature of these survival strategies – many of which went unrecorded because they were private or illicit – makes it difficult for historians to reconstruct how people managed, but it is very clear that formal charitable relief was rarely the sole source of income for those threatened by poverty.

The authorities attempted to deal with poverty using a broad range of methods. As you will see, they variously tried to record, relieve or repress the poor – with mixed success.

The responses of the poor

Even when formal charity was available, official institutions were almost never the first source of support for the poor. Instead, they began by looking for informal help from family, friends or neighbours.

Old age was a particularly common cause of poverty and elderly people often turned to their working-age children for aid. In some cases, particularly in southern and eastern Europe, this included living together. In peasant communities, elderly parents often continued to live on the family farm even as their adult children took over responsibility for working the land and running the household. The same process sometimes occurred among artisan families, allowing younger family members to gradually gain control over the household

while also providing for their aged parents. In northern and western Europe, grown-up children tended to leave home to set up their own households, so in these cases a mother or father threatened with poverty might remain in separate accommodation but receive some material support from their offspring.

However, not all paupers were lucky enough to have immediate family capable of offering them assistance in a moment of crisis. Many were forced to seek help from further afield. Kinship networks could be a valuable source of support and might extend from siblings living nearby to distant relatives residing many kilometres away. Those who had lived in the same place for many years could usually call on the support of their neighbours when faced with unexpected hardships. This included groups of female friends and neighbours who offered each other mutual support, including shelter from abusive husbands.

The help offered through such informal connections could take the form of food, cash, accommodation or employment, but one of the most common favours granted to the poor was credit. Small-scale loans were an essential part of the early modern economy, especially for those whose income was unreliable and irregular. When a misfortune such as disease or unemployment struck, small short-term loans from family or friends were often the only thing that kept the most vulnerable from going hungry. The most 'reputable' poor people might also use their credit with local bakers and butchers to supply them with enough food to last through a short period of exceptional need. Employers and landlords also regularly lent money to their 'inferiors', and sometimes these were very substantial sums. Moreover, some labourers and tenants could buy food from their lords at discounted rates in times of famine and could miss many months of rent payments before being threatened with eviction. Most aristocrats showed a 'lenient attitude towards the collection of debts'; in Spain, monastic landowners commonly forgave unpaid rent in bad years (Fontaine, 2014, pp. 35–6). Most of these various forms of emergency credit were never officially recorded – unlike a formal cash loan from a money-lender – and few creditors were likely to profit from such practices. Such lending was frequently interest-free and might not be paid back for months or even years, if at all. Thus, granting credit to the poor was often motivated by less directly material concerns, such as family ties, neighbourly familiarity, religious duty, or the hope of mutual support in the future. Loans from 'superiors' to 'inferiors' also reinforced the social hierarchy by creating relationships of deference

and paternalism – the poor had to acknowledge their own helplessness, whereas the wealthy burnished their reputations as ‘fatherly’ or ‘motherly’ benefactors. Landlords and employers might not profit directly from extending credit to their tenants and workers, but they gained power and influence through doing so.

Poor people who had exhausted their credit – or who needed more aid than charitable loans could provide – could hope for at least some small relief through begging. Most commonly, a man or woman in need simply knocked on a door or greeted a passer-by with a request for alms or for something to eat. This was especially common on Sundays and the frequent holy days that were associated with charity, such as Christmas. As you saw above, some wealthy people had a very negative view of street beggars and would be unlikely to give money to strangers seeking alms. However, often the person begging would already know the potential benefactor because most paupers begged within their own village or neighbourhood. Such direct requests were very often successful, for it was widely believed that all good Christians had a duty to offer help to the needy and this continued to spur almsgiving even when begging was officially forbidden. As a result, the poor sought alms from ordinary families and, of course, also approached nobles, clergymen and other local notables. According to custom, individuals with wealth and authority had the greatest responsibility to give. Nobles in particular had to demonstrate hospitality and munificence towards the poor. Monasteries and other religious institutions also felt special responsibility to relieve those who came to their gates, though again this source of charity disappeared in many countries with the coming of Protestantism in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, begging remained a promising survival strategy into the eighteenth century and beyond.

The responses to poverty that have received by far the most attention from modern historians are those provided by the formal institutions that existed at this time. Such interest is partly because these institutions were much more likely to leave records than informal almsgivers, and partly because official sources of relief expanded considerably during these centuries. From the perspective of the poor themselves, the growth in institutional relief in many parts of Europe undoubtedly offered the prospect of a somewhat more stable source of support than begging, but on its own such relief very rarely provided enough to get by. The range of institutions varied between different periods and different places – as discussed in more detail below – but

might include hospitals, **almshouses**, workhouses, or locally administered cash doles. In late sixteenth-century Bologna, for example, a variety of options might be open to vulnerable women. There was a refuge for abused wives, a hostel for former prostitutes, a trade school for poor girls and even a home for well-born young women who needed help. Some Bolognese women were able to effectively use these institutions to care for their children or gain a marriage **dowry**.

A poor person seeking formal relief could never expect an automatic offer of support, no matter how needy they might be. They always had to petition for aid, and even then a positive response was not guaranteed. Such requests for relief were normally made in person, with the pauper appearing in front of the local authorities or the donors in order to make a case for themselves. Sometimes the pauper sent a written petition – usually drawn up by a scribe – and in these cases we can see more clearly the strategies adopted by the poor in an effort to secure charity. They inevitably used a very humble and deferential tone, acknowledging their own subservience and asking for a merciful response. In many cases they offered a detailed description of their miserable circumstances, emphasising their helplessness by noting injuries or illness and highlighting their neediness by listing young children in their care. If they were lucky, poor people might also be able to include a letter of support from their neighbours, testifying to their status as a fit object of charity. Frequently such requests were initially deferred or refused, so paupers then had to send further petitions or appeal to a higher authority for redress.

In 1691 a Bradford widow named Dorothy Taylor sent a formal letter (‘humble petition’) to the Yorkshire magistrates (‘justices of the peace’), asking them to order the town’s local officials (‘overseers of the poor’) to provide her with relief. The letter itself would have been written by a scribe, but Dorothy probably told him what to write.

Exercise 6.3

Turn to Reading 6.2, *Petition of Dorothy Taylor of Bradford, widow, 1691*, located at the end of the chapter. As you read, consider the following questions:

- Why has Dorothy Taylor sent this letter?
- How does she justify her request?

- What can this case tell us about how the poor responded to the threat of destitution?

(Note that in response to the petition, a local magistrate was sent to investigate, but the final outcome is unknown.)

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

- According to this letter, Dorothy Taylor is seeking help because she is desperate. She is deeply in poverty and has previously asked for help from the town officials, but they have refused her requests. She wants the court to overrule the decision of the town and force the local officials to provide her with aid.
 - Dorothy tries to persuade the court to rule in her favour by highlighting the severity of her poverty, using very emotionally charged language. She specifically focuses on her helplessness by noting her old age, widowhood and failing eyesight. She emphasises the depth of her need by noting that she has three small children and that her whole family is apparently at risk of starvation. The letter is filled with strong rhetoric describing her situation ('deplorable condition'), her behaviour ('tears' and 'prayers') and the uncharitable attitude of the town officials ('adamantine in heart').
 - The fact that this letter was sent shows us that many poor people were not completely helpless or passive in the face of severe destitution. It also shows that they were aware of their legal rights and not afraid to try to hold local officials to account. The court's decision to send someone to investigate implies that such appeals could sometimes be successful.
-

As well as seeking out aid from neighbours or officials, many poor people responded to the threat of poverty by trying to find some alternative form of employment. For example, if a child lost one or both parents, it was common for the boy or girl to be placed into service with another family for several years, where they would act as a servant in exchange for food, lodging and training. Thus, in Paris in 1610 an abandoned wife named Mary Frevel agreed to send her 11-year-old son Adam to work for a ribbon-maker. In return for Adam's service, the boy was to receive 'fire, bed, lodging and light' and his mother would be paid 6 livres a year (Chojnacka and Wiesner-Hanks,

2002, p. 24). Through such arrangements, poor families reduced some of their expenses and sometimes gained a small income.

When opportunities to work disappeared in one area, those left without an income might take the drastic step of migrating in search of better prospects. For some, this was an annual routine. Every September the hop harvest in Kent attracted poor workers from across south-eastern England, while the grape harvest in south-eastern France drew in thousands of people from adjacent mountainous regions. However, for others this was a much more permanent move. Peasants and rural labourers often abandoned their home villages only if they faced dire poverty, anxiously setting out for the growing towns in the hope of finding work there. Not all of the 8,000 or so migrants who arrived in London each year in the seventeenth century were fleeing landlessness and unemployment, but certainly many were. After the establishment of English colonies in America in the early seventeenth century, a number of brave souls went further still, heading for the ports in order to book passage to the New World. A voyage across the Atlantic was costly and most could pay for it only by selling their labour to a master in the colonies. They would sign an **indenture** agreeing to become a servant in exchange for passage on a ship and the freedom to set up on their own after perhaps seven years. Life in the Virginia tobacco fields and the West Indian sugar plantations was so hard that many would not survive until the end of their indenture, but those who did usually found better prospects in the Americas than the grinding poverty that had confronted them at home.

Reputable, legal employment was not always possible to find. Both those on the move and those who remained at home sometimes had to resort to less acceptable means of getting by. Pedlars, for example, were seen by officials as little better than vagrants. Likewise, women who fell on hard times sometimes turned to prostitution, particularly those who migrated to towns to become servants but then failed to gain a position. Women selling sex might save themselves from destitution, but this came at the cost of marginalisation and occasionally persecution. Other illicit activities such as smuggling and poaching also offered a risky but potentially crucial way to earn some income.

The most common ‘crime of necessity’ was theft. A few ‘gentlemen highwaymen’ and professional robbers existed, but the vast majority of thefts were committed by the poor. In many cases stealing was an act of desperation, as can be seen by the increasing number of thefts

recorded during food shortages. When the grain harvests failed repeatedly in the late 1590s, prosecutions for theft in places like Surrey and Kent rose to about double their previous levels. Unsurprisingly, those caught stealing often pleaded poverty as an excuse. Although not all such claims are believable, and the authorities did not necessarily accept this as an excuse, the frequency and occasional success of these pleas are suggestive. The poor – and sometimes even their wealthier neighbours – saw ‘crimes of necessity’ as a legitimate response to the threat of starvation (Hindle, 2004, pp. 81–92).

The most dramatic reaction to sudden poverty was public protest or riot. This was not an automatic or unthinking response – people did not take to the streets merely because they were poor or hungry – but it was common enough to worry the authorities. People might resort to protest when threatened with poverty through the loss of access to land, the imposition of a new tax, the arrival of troops, or the rising price of food. Open complaint by the very poorest and most vulnerable was rare, presumably because paupers who were already dependent on charity for their survival could not risk offending their superiors. Instead it was usually labouring people who launched food riots and other public protests. Moreover, they were frequently successful in prompting the authorities to grant some redress or distribute relief. For example, when high prices hit France in the late 1520s and early 1530s crowds of journeymen, labourers, women and boys repeatedly marched through the streets of Lyon and seized grain from the municipal granary there. Although some were whipped or hanged as a result, the crowds succeeded in prompting price controls and extensive relief measures.

The responses of the authorities

Early modern authorities responded to poverty through a range of strategies almost as diverse as those employed by the poor themselves. Some of these were similar to welfare and policing policies in Europe today, while others were much more violent and arbitrary. Over the course of the period, there was a gradual shift across most of Europe towards addressing poverty through more systematic, bureaucratic measures. Yet even by 1800 only a few countries had anything remotely resembling a ‘modern’ structure for dealing with the needy.

The wealthy elite became increasingly anxious about the threat of the poor in this period. In part, this was due to the rising social tensions

caused by population growth, inflation and land scarcity. Alongside this economic pressure, many scholars have suggested that the Protestant Reformation and, to a lesser extent, religious change in Catholic countries intensified official concerns about supposed idleness and immorality among the poor. As a result, authorities in many parts of Europe began to use force more frequently as a response to poverty, and some activities associated with the poor were increasingly criminalised. Governments passed new laws against vagrancy, which was often simply defined as ‘wandering and begging’, in a failed effort to keep desperate individuals from taking to the road in search of work and alms. In the German town of Ulm, for example, civic orders forbade begging in the streets and other acts of vagrancy, which led to hundreds of beggars being flogged and expelled from the city in the later sixteenth century. In many cities across Europe, disciplinary institutions such as ‘houses of correction’ were established to imprison vagrants and put them to work. The most notorious of these was Bridewell in London, which served as a workhouse and prison for over 1,000 inmates by 1700 (see Figure 6.4). Official responses to theft and protest were also usually severe. It was not uncommon to hang poor convicts for stealing goods worth little more than the equivalent of a day’s wage, while those granted mercy might instead be sentenced to the often fatal life of a soldier, galley slave or servant in the colonies. According to the elite, violent public punishment of the disorderly and dangerous poor was absolutely necessary to encourage hard work, thrift and morality among the needy.

Officials routinely offered relief as well as punishment. As ‘godly’ magistrates, they had a responsibility to ensure that the hungry were fed. Although the cultural changes of the sixteenth century may have made both Protestants and Catholics more suspicious of those claiming poverty, charity remained an essential Christian duty for early modern rulers. More practically, the preservation of good order required carrots as well as sticks. So, by providing support to at least some of the needy, the authorities could both honour God and diminish social dissent. Relief took innumerable forms, but two features were common throughout Europe at this time. First, official charity was local rather than national. Relief schemes were run by the leaders of towns, villages and neighbourhoods, rather than central governments. Second, even the most successful schemes were not comprehensive in their reach. Only a tiny proportion of the poor received enough official support to live without any other income. The vast majority of impoverished individuals were granted more limited relief or none at all.



Figure 6.4 William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress*, plate 4, 1732, etching and engraving. Photo: © akg-images / Quint and Lox. This depicts Bridewell, the main workhouse in London. In it, we see people imprisoned for vagrancy and petty theft being forced to work at the dull, repetitive task of beating hemp, while the supervisor threatens them with a switch. Note the 'stocks' on the back wall, where a man is held, upon which is written 'Better to Work than Stand thus'.

Formal relief was concentrated in towns and cities, with civic officials taking a strong role in directing schemes for the poor. They collected funds from private donations, public subscriptions and occasionally direct taxation, which they then distributed through a variety of channels. Fatherless children could be sent to an orphanage or offered a subsidised apprenticeship with a local artisan. Elderly and infirm paupers might be granted a place in an almshouse or hospital. Civic coffers also supplied monthly cash doles and occasional one-off payments to paupers who could not work due to disability or disease. The authorities were far less generous in their treatment of the able-bodied poor, though a few might be granted small relief payments if they could present an especially persuasive case for their need. More often, they were sent to one of the many new workhouses that were established in this period, where they received a basic diet but little else. When times were particularly hard due to economic depression or

high prices, further support might be forthcoming. For instance, some towns had municipal granaries that provided free or subsidised food to the hungry.

In the countryside, where the vast majority of the population lived and worked, official secular relief tended to be less well established. Here, as in some towns, the church was the institution that took most responsibility for the poor and, from the Middle Ages onwards, canon law required every parish to support its neediest parishioners. The local minister thus took a leading role in dealing with the severest cases of poverty, often joined by lay officials such as churchwardens and sometimes by a group of prominent local residents. The funds came from collections at weekly services, gifts from pious individuals and income from tithes or church-held property. In most cases, this provided enough money to grant small sums to widows, orphans and other helpless paupers, but rarely much more than that. As a result of the slim supply of formal relief, villagers were normally forced to rely on other strategies from the ‘economy of makeshifts’ in order to survive when a crisis struck. Only in a handful of places, most notably England, did a more bureaucratic and secular system of relief become widespread in villages as well as towns.

We should not attempt to make too firm a distinction between punishment and relief in this period. For officials, these were both ‘duties’ to be taken equally seriously. Violence – according to the logic of the time – was a potentially ‘charitable’ attempt to ‘save’ the poor from a life of sin and enable them to rejoin Christian society. Similarly, for the desperate, punishment sometimes appeared to be an unavoidable part of obtaining relief. Paupers might be subjected to the humiliation of wearing a special badge marking them out as recipients of charity. Workhouses embodied both aspects of the official response, for they supplied a cot and a meal but at the cost of high walls and the threat of the whipping post.

Finally, for historians, one of the most important innovations of this period is the authorities’ new interest in measuring and surveying the extent of poverty within their dominions. Governments undertook many local and a few large-scale surveys which offer scholars invaluable information. Towns such as Strasbourg and Norwich conducted detailed censuses of their poor in the sixteenth century (Jütte, 1994, pp. 56–7). More ambitiously, in 1696 the English government attempted the first national survey of poor relief spending, asking officials in each of the country’s 9,000 or so parishes to return

information on how much they each raised and distributed for the benefit of the poor: a process that was repeated several more times in the eighteenth century. Such investigations were part of the wider effort to bring reform and ‘improve’ the poor, attempting to transform them from a social threat and an economic drain into a productive resource that could contribute to national power and wealth.

Online session 6.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 6.1. This should take around 35 minutes.

The English Poor Law: a special case?

The most famous response to poverty in the early modern period is the ‘Old Poor Law’ of England and Wales (sometimes referred to as the Elizabethan Poor Law). This was in fact not a single law, but a series of statutes that culminated in two Acts of Parliament in 1598 and 1601. These set out a legal framework for dealing with the poor that remained essentially unchanged until the so-called ‘New Poor Law’ of 1834. Its key features were:

- *National scope.* The law applied equally to every city, town and village in England and Wales.
- *Funded by taxes.* The cost of the relief system was met primarily through compulsory local property taxes (**‘poor rates’**).
- *Public officials.* Implementation was assigned to a new group of secular local officials (overseers of the poor), supervised by county magistrates (justices of the peace).
- *Right to relief.* Local officials had a legal duty to provide relief to the truly needy, if only enough to prevent starvation.
- *Punishment of begging.* Wandering and begging (‘vagrancy’) were supposed to be punished by whipping and/or imprisonment. Beggars were to be sent to their last place of residence (or ‘settlement’).
- *Provision of work.* The law acknowledged involuntary unemployment and required local officials to provide work for the able-bodied poor.

As a response to poverty, the English Poor Law fits with the wider shift towards centralised and bureaucratic systems common across most of Europe at this time. The national reach of the legislation and oversight by royal law courts meant that, in theory, the process of relief would be uniform throughout the country. The ban on begging, the use of local taxation and the creation of ‘overseers of the poor’ were designed to ensure that funds would be distributed more rationally compared with casual personal charity provided by individual almsgivers. Similarly, the legal obligation to provide relief to the helpless and work for the able-bodied was intended to eliminate both starvation and idleness. The result, it was hoped, would be a just and economically efficient society.

Some historians have argued that the English system was unique in early modern Europe. Peter Solar, for example, suggests that it was exceptional in its ‘uniformity and comprehensiveness’, ‘certainty and generosity’ and tax-based financing (Solar, 1995, pp. 3, 6). The fact that England was the first nation in Europe to escape the recurring mass starvation caused by famine may be evidence for its distinctive success in providing basic welfare for its population. England’s last famine came in the early seventeenth century, while the poor relief system was still being extended across the country, whereas widespread starvation continued to blight countries like Scotland, Ireland and France throughout the early modern period and sometimes beyond.

However, other scholars are not convinced that the English response to poverty was especially distinctive. It was certainly not the first place to implement most of these measures. Earlier efforts to centralise poor relief under the control of secular authorities are evident in German- and French-speaking cities such as Nuremberg, Strasbourg, Augsburg, Ypres and Nîmes, each of which established a municipal ‘common chest’ in the 1520s to supply assistance to the needy. Similarly, attempts to establish nationwide uniform poor relief systems can be found elsewhere in Europe. From 1536 to 1566 French kings issued a series of decrees to restrict begging, supply work for the unemployed and relieve local paupers through parish-level collections. Meanwhile, Scotland passed several acts in the late sixteenth century that were copied directly from English legislation. They too declared that every parish should be responsible for supporting its own poor and authorised local taxation to pay for it. In the southern Low Countries (now Belgium), local legal bodies known as ‘poor tables’ were established in every parish in the early modern period; they became

responsible for administering relief. By the eighteenth century, paupers here were ‘successfully asserting their right to be relieved’, just as they did in England (Winter and Lambrecht, 2013, pp. 102–3).

Possibly the most distinctive feature of the English Poor Law was the way it was implemented and enforced nationwide. In both France and Scotland, despite the new legal framework, voluntary collections rather than compulsory taxation remained the primary method for raising funds for the poor, and clergymen or religious officials rather than secular officers tended to retain control over local relief. Yet even in implementation England is not truly unique. As mentioned above, the system established in the southern Low Countries featured parish-level administration and a right to relief that were remarkably similar to those found in England.

Finally, many scholars have shown that the English response to poverty was not as rationalised or uniform as is sometimes imagined. The ‘economy of makeshifts’ described earlier in the chapter was still essential to the poor even in eighteenth-century London, which had the most extensive and long-standing relief system in the country. Here, begging was formally outlawed and monthly parish pensions for destitute paupers were common, but poor people continued to rely heavily on unofficial sources of support to survive. Neighbourly charity, alms from passers-by, gifts from the livery companies (the name given to guilds in London) and income from petty crime were just as essential to the ‘economy of makeshifts’ for poor Londoners as payments from the overseers of the poor. There were also sharp variations in the levels of official relief for the poor within different parts of England. Despite a national law overseen by a centralised court system, poor relief spending was much more generous in the south and south-east of England, especially in rural grain-growing areas. In contrast, official assistance was less generous in northern and western regions and in pastoral, industrial and urban communities (King, 2000). We should not, therefore, assume that England’s Poor Law created a modern welfare system that was comprehensive in its support or consistent in its reach.

The distinctiveness of the English system is still open to debate. It was certainly unusual in having both a clear national policy and extensive local implementation. Indeed, English poor relief was unique in combining compulsory taxation and secular administration with a legally enforced duty to supply the necessities of the truly destitute. But each of these individual elements can be found elsewhere in

Europe by the seventeenth century, even if they were never combined in the same way. More importantly, the official relief system was hardly the only response to destitution in early modern England. Both the poor and the authorities deployed a diverse range of strategies to try to counteract the effects of poverty, among which the Poor Law was only one of many.

Online session 6.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 6.2. This should take around an hour and 10 minutes.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the difficulty of making generalisations about the lives of the poor across early modern Europe as a whole. As we have seen, life in good years was very different from life in bad years, and the frequency of bad years was probably higher in the seventeenth century thanks to population growth, inflation and war. There were also changes in perceptions and responses to the poor. Elites became increasingly worried about the able-bodied poor and, as a result, they more frequently imposed corporal punishment and forced labour. Alongside this, the authorities established more centralised, bureaucratic relief systems. A portrait of the governors of the Amsterdam orphanage in 1663 shows this process clearly (Figure 6.5). We can see the bookkeeper entering the room at the back holding the Children's Book, in which all new children were registered, while several of the governors are holding papers that represent the supporting documentation, such as certificates of citizenship, required for admission to the orphanage. The process of formal examination and careful record keeping pictured here was part of the wider shift towards official oversight of charity that was unfolding across much of the continent (Ketelaar, 2013, pp. 78–81). As section 6.2 showed, there were also significant contrasts between the treatment of the poor in places such as England – where a secular, tax-funded relief system covered the entire country – and much of southern Europe – where church-run, voluntary aid predominated.

Yet this chapter has also shown that we cannot exaggerate the extent of the changes and contrasts in early modern Europe. The causes of poverty at the beginning of the period were much the same as those at the end – namely age, widowhood, illness or high prices. Similarly, the attempts to reorganise and rationalise poor relief were never more than partly successful. The poor continued to draw on a wider 'economy of makeshifts', rather than relying exclusively on waged labour or formal doles. Finally, the contrasts between different countries and different religious outlooks should not be overdrawn. Although there were real differences between the situation in, say, a Protestant town such as London and a Catholic village in Italy, the struggles of the poor had much in common across the whole continent. No matter where they were, poor people had to use a broad range of strategies in order to survive the harsh realities of life at this time.



Figure 6.5 Jürgen Ovens, *Regents of the Civil Orphanage (Burgerweeshuis) in Amsterdam*, 1663. 257 x 401 cm. Amsterdam Museum, inv.nr. SB 4843. Collection Amsterdam Museum, bruikleen van Stichting Spirit. This painting depicts the governors of Amsterdam's largest orphanage reviewing applications for admission. The boy standing at the front, cap in hand, must be asking for a place and the children on the left are presumably his siblings or other applicants.

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Readings

Reading 6.1 Ned Ward, 'The beggars club', 1709

Source: Ward, N. (1709) 'The beggars club', in *The History of the London Clubs, or, the Citizens Pastime*, London, Part 1, p. 7.

This Society of Old Bearded Hypocrites, Wooden-Legg'd Implorers of Charity, Strolling Clappeldugeons, Limping Dissemblers, Sham-disabled Seamen, Blind Gunpowder-blasted Mumpers, and old broken Limb'd Labourers, hold their weekly Meeting at a famous Boozing Ken in the midst of Old-street, where by the Vertue of sound tipples, the pretenders to the dark are restor'd instantly to their Sight, those afflicted with feign'd sickness recover perfect Health, and others that halt before they are Lamé stretch their Legs without their Crutches. When the Jovial Crew their dirty Handkerchiefs and Night Caps are slipt into their Pockets, their Cripp'l'd Legs and Arms taken out their Slings, and return'd from their Cramping Postures to their Ease and Liberty; where after they have soundly liquord their Paunches, they sing this new song, which is call'd the Beggars new Ballad. [...]

What tho' we make the World believe

That we are Sick and Lamé

'Tis now a Virtue to deceive,

The Righteous do the same,

In Trade dissembling is no Crime,

And we shall live to see

That begging in a little Time,

A common Trade will be.

Reading 6.2 Petition of Dorothy Taylor of Bradford, widow, 1691

Source: Petition of Dorothy Taylor of Bradford, widow, 1691, West Riding Archive Service at Wakefield, QS1/30/2/6.

To the right worshipful their majesties' justices of the peace for the West Riding of the County of York the humble petition of Dorothy Taylor of Bradford in the County aforesaid widow humbly sheweth.

That your poor petitioner being above fifty years of age her eyesight begineth to fail and otherwise disenabled that she cannot labour and toil as formerly nor do anything competent or considerable towards maintaining herself and being left with three small children she cannot possibly provide for them likewise but is thereby reduced to that poverty, misery and want that she and her poor children is likely to perish for want of both food and raiment and your poor petitioner hath often made complaint and related her condition to the present overseers of the poor for the town aforesaid but they are so obdurate, stony, rocky and adamantine in heart that my tears, prayers, persuasions, nor entreaties (nor any others in the like calamity) can penetrate nor mollify so that unless some speedy course be taken your poor petitioner with many others in Bradford will be likely to famish for want of relief.

Your poor petitioner therefore humbly implores your worships to commiserate her deplorable condition with her fatherless children, and that you would be pleased to grant your worships' order to the Overseers of Bradford aforesaid that some considerable allowance may be given her for her family's relief according to her necessities that so none of them perish for want of relief and in so doing your poor petitioner will ever pray for your worships' health, prosperity and welfare here on earth and eternal felicity and happiness hereafter.

Chapter 7 The European elite: nobility and gentry

Neil Younger

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the nature and attributes of the nobility
- examine the role of the nobility in early modern society and their relation to other groups
- look at change and continuity in the economic, social and political roles of the nobility.

Introduction

As you read in the introduction to Book 1 (Chapter 1), early modern Europe was not an egalitarian society. It was highly hierarchical, organised into a series of different layers of greater or lesser esteem, social prestige and wealth. This chapter focuses on the elites, to see how they differed from ordinary people and what role they played in wider society and economy – why they mattered. In the extract from Charles Loyseau's *Traité des ordres et simples dignités* ('Treatise on orders and plain/simple dignities') of 1610 that you looked at in Chapter 1 (Reading 1.1), you saw that society was often described as being composed of three orders or sections: clergy, nobility and commons (depicted in Figure 7.1). The nobility were defined there as those whose role was 'protecting the state by their arms', a concept which originated in the Middle Ages but which remained powerful throughout the early modern period.

The distinctiveness of the three orders was also a legal reality: people were not all equal before the law, as is the case now (theoretically at least). Both clergy and nobility had legal privileges which gave them advantages over the common people. It is revealing that the French Revolution, which abolished these privileges in France, placed great stress on equality, along with liberty and fraternity. By this the revolutionaries meant equality of laws and privileges, not merely wealth: they were attacking the concept, so dear to the nobility, that nobles were not just richer, but *better*. The fact that it took until 1789 for this to be articulated so decisively is a demonstration of how pervasive these ideas about the nobility remained throughout the early modern period.

In this chapter you will be looking at the nobility across Europe. Nobles were to be found everywhere in Europe and, as you will see, they had a great deal in common. In certain ways, it could be said that the nobility formed a single, pan-European elite, who recognised each other as equals across borders. Nevertheless, there were also significant variations from place to place, and you will be looking at some of those directly.



Figure 7.1 Attributed to Adriaen van de Venne, *Death with the Three Orders of Church, State and People*, 1628, oil on panel, 29 x 29 cm. The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, Co. Durham, UK. Photo: The Bowes Museum. The three orders are depicted stating their respective social roles, while the figure above acts as a reminder that death comes to all of them.

7.1 The nobility as a group

The nobility were a relatively small group within society, as most elites are. The size of the group depends on exactly how it is defined, but in most parts of Europe we can regard something in the region of just 1 or 2 per cent of the people as belonging to the noble elite.

It is important to recognise that, just as society as a whole was organised as a hierarchy, so the nobility too formed a strictly hierarchical pyramid. At the top was of course a single individual: the king, queen, prince or emperor who ruled over the entire state and held sovereign power. These individuals were very much seen as the highest level of the hierarchy of nobles, but as a step above and beyond them. The monarch’s family formed the top tier of the nobility, just as in the modern UK royal family the monarch’s descendants are given titles such as Duke of York or Duke of Cambridge. Below them were the nobility proper: a series of aristocrats, ranked by titles that varied across Europe but were often similar, as Table 7.1 shows. Thus, for example, a small number of dukes outranked a larger group of counts or earls and a yet larger group of barons. This elite-within-an-elite was usually referred to as the major or greater nobility (in Latin, *nobilitas maior*), or the peerage. Their titles were hereditary, and were passed on from father to the eldest son (or in some places to all children).

Table 7.1 Comparative table of European titles of nobility*

	England	France	Spain	Germany
Monarch	King	Roi	Rey	Kaiser [emperor]
Greater nobility	Prince	Prince	Principe	Fürst
	Duke	Duc	Duque	Herzog
	Marquess	Marquis	Marqués	Margrave
	Earl	Comte	Conde	Graf
	Viscount	Vicomte	Vizconde	Burggraf
	Baron	Baron	Barón	Freiherr
Lesser nobility	Knight	Chevalier	Caballero	Ritter
	Gentleman	Gentilhomme	Hidalgo	Edler

*These are the male forms. All of them had a female equivalent, which were ordinarily used by the wives or in some cases daughters of noblemen.

Below this in the hierarchy were the knights and gentlemen. In most of Europe they would be referred to the lesser or lower nobility (in Latin, *nobilitas minor*), but in England they were known as ‘gentry’, and in Scotland as ‘lairds’. These usually had no hereditary title and lacked other privileges, and in the eyes of some this made them qualitatively different. In England, for example, they would not be able to sit in the House of Lords, but could seek election to the House of Commons. In most practical respects, however, they resembled the greater nobility, on a smaller scale. They also possessed land, but they tended to have less of it; they also served in war or politics, but in a subordinate role, and so on. There were vast differences of scale between the greatest noble and the least, as you will see, but all of them had a great deal in common in terms of their ideology and behaviour.

Terminology

There are a confusing variety of terms for the elites. This chapter mostly uses the word ‘nobility’ (or ‘nobles’, ‘noblemen’ and so on) as it is a loosely defined term. It is used in the European sense rather than the British, to include both titled and non-titled people, as explained above.

‘Aristocracy’ is an alternative loosely defined word for the nobility. It derives from the Greek *aristokratia*, meaning the rule of the best, so strictly speaking it refers to rule or government by nobles, as distinct from democracy or monarchy. In this sense it is a reminder of the close connection between the nobility and government.

The ‘peerage’ refers in Britain to the greater nobility, those with hereditary titles of baron or above, who are individually referred to as peers. In France this term was used for a much more selective group of high nobles.

7.2 The characteristics of the nobility

What, then, were the nobility like? What set them apart from non-nobles? Were they genuinely a discrete group separated from the rest of society, or merely the top end of a seamless pyramid of greater or lesser wealth and status? The question was one of considerable importance in early modern Europe, since it determined who was able to access the many privileges of being noble. Yet commentators have always had difficulty offering a precise definition of the nobility, as the extracts in exercise 7.1 will show.

Exercise 7.1

Turn to Reading 7.1, A set of short extracts from early modern commentators, located at the end of the chapter. What do they suggest characterised or defined the nobility?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

The writers quoted in Reading 7.1 find it difficult to be precise on the definition of the nobility, citing a range of factors: titles bestowed by rulers, behaviour, birth or blood, wealth, power.

All of the factors cited in Reading 7.1 as defining nobility were true, but very few of them were watertight definitions. For example, nobles typically owned land, but non-nobles could own land too. Most nobles had been born noble and were therefore believed to have ‘noble blood’, but it was possible for new nobles to be created, so clearly not all of them were born noble. Many nobles were virtuous, but of course many were not. And so on.

Ultimately, it is (and was) very difficult to give a perfect definition of the nobility. Yet nobody doubted that they were a reality. In a sense, nobility was something one knew when one saw it. Most commentators agreed that nobles possessed a quality of nobility or gentility which was innate to them and which set them apart from non-nobles: they were in fact special, different and better. This applied to both the greater and the lesser nobility.

But what was that quality? What did true nobility mean? Where did it lie? These questions were debated intensely in early modern Europe. There were essentially two lines of argument. On the one hand there were those who insisted that true nobility lay in one's behaviour and qualities of mind, in acting nobly. In theory, therefore, nobility could be justified objectively: nobles were the best individuals, and anyone could attain nobility by behaving in the right way, as the quote from William Segar in Reading 7.1 suggests. This definition was deeply problematic, however, since in practice even extremely virtuous commoners seldom rose to noble status.

The alternative explanation was that noble status derived from birth: someone was noble because his or her ancestors were noble. The idea that noble blood could be inherited was an extremely powerful one. The 'oldest' families were perceived as the best: ancient nobility, particularly that of families which could be traced back to the Middle Ages, was seen as especially prestigious, and the deeds of noble ancestors reflected glory on their descendants. Loyseau wrote that 'our usage is that the more ancient one's proof of nobility, the more honourable it is' (Loyseau, [1610] 1994, p. 78). For this reason, nobles maintained careful (sometimes obsessive) records of their ancestry and kinship: you can see an example in Figure 7.2. They displayed this through heraldry, the colourful, memorable medieval 'logos' of their families, which also demonstrated their status as a warrior elite. They also sought to avoid diluting their bloodlines through marriage with non-nobles.

Both of these conceptions of nobility – behaviour and birth – existed together, sometimes rather uneasily, in contemporaries' minds. Ideally, of course, the two went together, and those nobles who had both were the most admired.

The nobility and the code of honour

It is also true, however, that being born noble encouraged people to live up to these expectations about their behaviour. Nobles' belief in the distinctiveness of their status influenced them to act in certain ways. They were expected, for example, to follow a set of rules called the code of honour. This derived from both classical and medieval thought, and overlaps with the medieval code of chivalry. Living honourably and preserving one's honour was a matter of intense importance among the nobility. For male nobles particularly, the



Figure 7.2 Section of the heraldic family tree of the Stanhope family, 1567. Nottinghamshire Archives, M8048. Photo: Nottinghamshire Archives. Many families commissioned elaborate family trees like this to record (and boast about) their long history and prestigious connections.

winning of honour – or at least maintaining the honour they were born with – was the primary goal in life. Honourable behaviour included qualities such as duty, loyalty and faithfulness to the ruler, courage in battle, honesty and keeping one's word, and protection of the weak. For women, it centred on sexual behaviour, maintaining one's virginity if unmarried, or maintaining sexual fidelity if married; but also included honesty, piety and generosity. Any behaviour that contravened these ideals would be liable to reduce honour. Of course in reality many nobles acted far from honourably, especially towards the poor or weak. But the ideal was still powerful.

In practice, there were a variety of things which could increase or reduce honour. Service to one's own family was important: passing on the family's status and property to a son intact, or if possible augmented, was important. To lose land (by being forced to sell it, for example) was something of a disgrace, although many nobles did it. Forging marriage alliances with other noble families was also

honourable. On top of this, success meant winning honour or renown through impressive deeds. Success in war was the most prestigious thing of all, because it was accompanied by danger. However, involvement in politics or government (either at court or in the localities) was also praiseworthy, perceived as a way of serving the monarch and society as a whole. Ideally, these efforts would add to a family's possessions, but the crucial thing was to win the admiration of others, and in particular one's peers – other nobles.

These aspirations of acting honourably placed a genuine restraint on nobles. If a nobleman broke the code of honour by lying, cheating, acting dishonestly and so on, he risked loss of honour, something viewed by nobles with genuine horror. Honour therefore somewhat resembled a set of laws, though it was judged not by courts of law but by the opinions of one's peers. If other nobles considered one dishonourable, then to all intents and purposes this was the case. In some ways this conception of honourable living is alien to present-day concerns, but in many ways it reflects a universal human desire to be admired by one's peers according to the contemporary criteria for admirable behaviour.

Noblemen also asserted the right to a special way of defending their honour, through trial by violence, specifically in the duel. If a nobleman felt that his honour had been impugned by another, even over seemingly trivial matters, he could challenge the offender to single combat (see Figure 7.3). Duelling was extremely common in the early modern period (much more so than in the medieval period). Duels were highly ritualised encounters, but deadly nonetheless, and significant numbers of young noblemen died defending their honour. In early seventeenth-century France, up to 350 noblemen died in duels *every year* (Asch, 2003, pp. 73–4). What all of this added up to is that being noble meant that one did not have to live by the normal rules of society, like ordinary people, who were not permitted to use violence in this way. Crucially, it also reasserted the nobleman's limited submission to the monarch and the state, which were supposed to be the only institutions permitted to use violence.



Figure 7.3 Image of fencing from Joachim Meyer, *Gründtliche Beschreibung der Kunst des Fechtens* ('A foundational description of the art of fencing'), 1570, Strasbourg. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA. Photo: Scala. Fencing was a highly regarded skill for a nobleman, not least because of the prevalence of duelling, and nobles often undertook training, as seen here.

Noble privilege

Nobles were therefore set apart. They possessed a variety of other privileges which also gave them advantages, regardless of their personal conduct. They had special titles and could demand to be addressed with respect, using terms such as 'your lordship' or 'your ladyship'. They could expect to be deferred to by lesser people; for instance, by sitting in the most prominent place in church. They could display heraldry, something that was regulated by law.

In more concrete terms, nobles were exempt from many taxes in most European states (though not in England), and they often enjoyed special protection against bankruptcy or debt. Nobles also had the right to special legal arrangements: they were tried by a court of their peers rather than by a normal jury.

Along with these privileges, however, nobles faced limitations on their freedom of action. It was universally agreed that they should not carry

out manual work, and trade was looked down on. As one Italian writer put it, 'trade is judged by wise men to be vile and base, and nothing that can be regarded as contemptible can be related to nobility in any way' (quoted in Skinner, 1987, pp. 136–7); although in fact in Italy nobles were rather more likely to be involved in commerce than they were elsewhere, partly because of the higher levels of urbanisation there. Nobles were also expected to marry someone of similar status. If they breached these rules, they laid themselves open to losing their noble status, either formally or informally.

It would be fair to say that the nobility, therefore, were genuinely different from non-nobles in their behaviour; they adhered to a set of rules that is alien to us now and was alien to most early modern people too, but that does not mean this was not important. Although it is difficult to define noble status precisely, it would be wrong to think it was not meaningful. The continued importance of the society of orders and of different legal and social status is one of the things that decisively marks early modern European society out from modern society.

7.3 Social mobility and the nobility

However much nobles liked to pretend that their status was innate and unchanging, there was in practice a real need for flexibility in the composition of the nobility. Most obviously, noble families often died out naturally, because of the dangers of childbearing and high infant mortality in this period. Deaths in war, the destruction of families for crimes such as treason, or overspending leading to bankruptcy might also lead a family to lose noble status.

The nobility therefore needed to be continually refreshed with new members. At the upper end, among the *nobilitas maior*, the right and responsibility for doing this belonged to rulers: monarchs awarded noble titles to those whom they favoured, or those who seemed to deserve the honour, and they could promote individuals to higher ranks within the nobility. Many rulers raised up their faithful ministers or personal friends.

At the lower end, among the *nobilitas minor*, the boundary between noble and non-noble was usually fairly porous in a more informal way. The prestige of the nobility meant that many non-nobles sought to join it. Those who obtained the necessary wealth would seek to be accepted as nobles or gentry. In some parts of Europe this was a fairly fluid process. In exercise 7.2 you will look at an example from England.

Exercise 7.2

Turn to Reading 7.2, William Harrison, 'Of degrees of people in the commonwealth of England' c.1587, located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- What criteria does Harrison lay down for men assuming the status of gentlemen?
- What do you think Harrison's opinion of this form of social mobility is?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

- Harrison stipulates that men assuming the status of gentlemen have to follow certain professions (law, scholarship, medicine, war or government service) which benefit the state. They also, however, have to have an appropriate level of wealth.
 - Harrison does not seem to regard this form of social mobility as problematic – indeed his description of it is even a little mocking.
-

A non-noble who practised an occupation such as the law or medicine ('physic'), military service or even trade might become as wealthy as a gentleman. Yet he would probably still be regarded as a wealthy commoner, not a gentleman. In order to be accepted as a gentleman, he had to begin to live as one. If he purchased land and began to make his income that way, rather than through his profession, this would help. He should also begin to follow the manners, dress and lifestyle of a gentleman, and educate his children to do the same. He might also obtain some of the trappings of gentility, such as a coat of arms, which, as Harrison writes, could easily be done. If he followed the rules, a new gentleman (or at any rate his descendants) would gradually become accepted as gentle. One important way of bolstering newly acquired gentle status was to intermarry with established gentry or nobles, a process which was often encouraged by offering a large dowry to the young couple in question. In due course they might even be promoted to the titled nobility.

A similar procedure could be followed elsewhere in Europe, such as in Spain, where wealthy townsmen could eventually begin to be accepted as nobles. Here, however, it was necessary to prove their status through exhaustive procedures in courts of law; any doubt the judges had needed to be smoothed over by means of dozens of witness statements and interventions from other powerful nobles (Casey, 2007, pp. 177–84). In France, individuals could obtain noble status by holding certain offices in the expanding royal administration. Individuals sought these offices for precisely this purpose and were prepared to pay handsomely for them; the royal government obliged by creating offices specifically to sell them. These *noblesse de robe* (nobles of the (legal) robe), often lawyers by training, were regarded with contempt by the older-established *noblesse d'épée* (nobles of the sword),

who saw them as upstarts or parvenus, despite their perfectly legal claims to nobility. This was, therefore, a dispute over the nature of nobility.

This kind of social mobility caused a good deal of unhappiness in early modern Europe. Many established nobles felt that new nobles devalued their prestigious status. Governments also became concerned about false nobles claiming tax exemption, and therefore sought to crack down on false claims to noble status (Casey, 2007, pp. 171–7).

Nevertheless, it had to be possible for some individuals to cross the dividing line between noble and non-noble: ‘it was extremely difficult to prevent a wealthy and skilful commoner slipping into the lesser nobility and even rising within it: the barrier between the Second Estate and the rest of society was always permeable’ (Scott, 1995, p. 17). The rise of new nobles enabled infusions of new money and new blood into the nobility. Nevertheless, the dividing line very much continued to exist; and while it was possible, it was never easy to cross this line, thus keeping the exclusive ethos of the nobility intact.

7.4 Nobles' wealth

One of the most obvious characteristics of the nobility is that they usually possessed above-average wealth. In the overwhelmingly rural, agricultural society of early modern Europe, the economy was fundamentally centred on the production of food, and nobles' wealth typically derived from their control of large amounts of the principal means of producing food: land. 'In western Europe, nobles owned about one-half to two-thirds of the land, and in eastern Europe almost all of it' (Wiesner-Hanks, 2013, p. 283).

Although nobles owned a great deal of land, they did not farm most of it themselves. The vast majority was leased out to non-nobles, who paid rents in cash or kind, giving nobles a regular, predictable income. Nobles might profit from landownership in other ways too. Very often they had the legal right to demand that their tenants spend time working on the lord's land without payment. Often, too, they could force local farmers to use the lord's mill to turn grain into flour, which was very profitable for them.

These rights over the land were typically the core of nobles' incomes, and they were highly reliable. Alongside these, there were various other ways for the nobility to make money. Many noblemen, particularly younger sons, became churchmen. In most of Europe, senior clergymen such as bishops or heads of monasteries came from noble families. Since the church possessed a great deal of wealth, this was an honourable way to provide a suitable income for nobles who were unlikely to become heads of their families. Royal service was another honourable occupation. Many leading officials in the growing ranks of government administrators came from noble families, and for the fortunate or capable few it was possible to make immense fortunes in this way, either through salaries or often by taking bribes of various kinds. Linked to this was service to the ruler in war, which again was a potential way of making a profit (although it was probably more common to lose money). Nobles might also invest in new colonial ventures such as trading with Africa and the Americas.

Although it was theoretically seen as inappropriate for nobles to engage in trade or industry, many in fact did so. Nobles were some of the earliest pioneers of large-scale mining in England, for example – not surprisingly, since they owned the land on which the minerals were to be found. Similarly, they often sought to engage in the

manufacturing of related products such as glass. In Spain or France, however, this would probably have been frowned on rather more.

Noble families typically worked very hard to preserve and, if possible, increase their wealth. Family marriage strategies were often very important here, and young people's marriages were arranged with a close eye to financial implications. The normal practice was for the bride's parents to provide their daughter with a large dowry in cash or land, and so marriage could be a kind of transaction in which the groom brought social status and the bride brought money. For this reason, marriage to an heiress was ideal: it could transform a family's fortunes. As the bulk of the family property would be expected to go to the eldest son, younger children were often highly restricted in their life choices and so had to make their own way in the world, in the army, the church, government service or trade, and might not be able to marry. Daughters were to be married off, or (in Catholic countries) could be sent to nunneries to avoid having to provide a cash dowry. In these ways, nobles often tended to prioritise the needs of the family over those of the individual.

Rich and poor

There was, therefore, a strong association between nobility and wealth, and most nobles were wealthier than non-nobles: they were an economic elite. As has been stated, however, members of the nobility varied a great deal in their wealth. In terms of landholding, for example, an ordinary gentleman might possess just one small estate, with the rents and rights that went along with it, and be the dominant landowner in one village; the richest nobles might control dozens or hundreds of manors or estates.

At the top of the scale, most European states had a fairly well-defined level of nobles who were marked out by their exceptional wealth, and the national status and power that went with it. A good example of this top layer of nobleman is Alonso Pérez de Guzmán, seventh Duke of Medina Sidonia (1549–1615), nicknamed 'el Bueno' (the good). He was the most powerful nobleman in his region of Andalusia (south-western Spain), around the port of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. His annual income of about 170,000 ducats was over 5,000 times the average wage of a labourer. His biographer writes that 'over four hundred folio pages were needed to catalogue the estates he inherited and his properties, rights, and jurisdictions within each' (Pierson, 1989, p. 3).

Medina Sidonia also engaged in the local salt and tuna trades. He was a cousin of the king; his son married a daughter of the king's principal minister, the Duke of Lerma (1553–1625); and another cousin, the Count-Duke of Olivares (1587–1645), later served as chief minister of Spain for two decades (see Figure 7.4). Medina Sidonia was, in short, a prince in his region, with what one historian has called 'almost unlimited local power' (Asch, 2003, p. 129) – a much more dominant presence than the royal government in far-off Madrid (Pierson, 1989; Elliott, 1986, p. 8).

There were nobles of comparable status in most parts of Europe. In the Habsburg lands of east-central Europe, by the mid-seventeenth century the Liechtenstein family were among the richest: Prince Karl Eusebius of Liechtenstein (1611–1684) maintained a household of over 200 people in the 1670s, funded of course by immense landholdings – 'about 20 per cent of all Moravian peasant farmers were tenants or serfs of the house of Liechtenstein' (Asch, 2003, p. 47). Between them, the Liechtenstein and Dietrichstein families controlled a quarter of all the land in Moravia, which is now the eastern part of the Czech Republic (Ingrao, 1994, p. 89). Families like this tended to have lands scattered across large areas, and therefore they had very widespread power and influence.

Most nobles, however, were much less wealthy and powerful, although in every part of Europe their houses and estates dominated the areas that surrounded them. A good example is Gilles de Gouberville (1521–1578), a minor noble in the Cotentin, near Cherbourg in northern France (see Figure 7.5). He had a large estate of not especially productive land and employed 14 servants. He owned the local mill (his largest source of income), and his **seigneurial rights** as landowner included being able to demand unpaid labour to harvest his crops. Gouberville was, therefore, modestly wealthy – at the very least he could afford to eat all the meat and drink all the cider or wine he wanted. He could indulge in hunting, gambling, playing dice and backgammon, paid close attention to breeding his horses and dogs, and occasionally bought books. But his style of living was much more modest than the likes of the Prince of Liechtenstein, and he seldom visited Paris or the royal court.

This economic position clearly placed Gouberville above the vast majority of his neighbours, but at the same time he was closely integrated into the day-to-day agricultural life of his estates. His house at Le Mesnil-en-Val was surrounded by outbuildings for livestock, and



Figure 7.4 Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, *Equestrian Portrait of the Count-Duke of Olivares; Don Gaspar de Guzmán*, 1634, oil on canvas, 313 x 239 cm. Prado, Madrid, Spain. Photo: De Agostini Picture Library/Bridgeman Images. The Count-Duke of Olivares was an aristocrat at the peak of the pyramid in seventeenth-century Spain in terms of wealth, power and prestige.



Figure 7.5 School of Pieter Jansz Pourbus, *Portrait of a Nobleman*, 1556, oil on board, 33 x 26 cm. Rochdale Art Gallery, Lancashire, UK. Photo: © Rochdale Art Gallery, Lancashire, UK/Bridgeman Images. No portrait of Gilles de Gouberville survives, but this simple and slightly amateurish portrait gives some idea of the contrast between him and the likes of Olivares.

he took his animals to market himself. He had very little cash – all of his wealth was in produce.

Gouberville was far from a conventional image of an aristocrat, yet a contemporary would have regarded him as undoubtedly noble, every bit as much as vastly wealthier nobles like Medina Sidonia or Liechtenstein. Gouberville himself retained a clear sense of his noble status and rights. The French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie argues that he was indifferent to his ancestry and dismissive of the military duties of the nobility, a ‘malingerer of the first order’:

What did nobility mean to Gouberville? The answer is simple. Basically, it meant belonging to a privileged caste of local land-owners, in whose families one found one’s friends and relations; more specifically, it meant a special quality that allowed its possessor to avoid paying the king’s taxes.

(Le Roy Ladurie, 1987, pp. 216–17)

But Le Roy Ladurie is surely much too dismissive of Gouberville’s conception of his noble status. He could prove his family’s nobility, dating back to c.1400, and spent a great deal of money defending his rights in court, often vastly more than they were worth – because one’s rights as a nobleman had to be defended. He was also mindful of the purity of his noble blood: he had a mistress who bore him several illegitimate children, but whom he would not marry because her low birth would be seen as a dishonour to his family (Le Roy Ladurie, 1987, pp. 200–24). Gouberville was clearly not especially glamorous, or stunningly wealthy, and he did not live in the grandest style. His horizons were extremely localised. Yet he provides a classic example of the minor provincial nobility who dotted the whole of Europe, and within his sphere of a few villages in northern France he was a dominant presence.

Although Gouberville was no Medina Sidonia or Liechtenstein, he was still richer than anyone else he would meet in a normal week. Despite the close association of wealth and social status, however, it was possible, particularly in certain parts of Europe, to be poor and to maintain your noble status. The two particular places where this was common were Spain and Poland.

In early modern Spain, poor minor nobles known as *hidalgos* were very common. They were descendants of the warriors who in the late Middle Ages had fought the campaigns to retake southern Spain from Muslim states, a process completed only in 1492. Thousands of soldiers assumed the status of *hidalgo* despite their relative lack of wealth and land, and many were no richer than peasants (Asch, 2003, p. 39). Therefore there was considerable variety in exactly how wealthy nobles were, and within the noble elite there were many gradations of status and prestige.

7.5 Noble lifestyles

A crucial element in asserting and defending one's nobility was maintaining an appropriate way of life: living as a noble in practice. There were various forms of behaviour which demonstrated and advertised noble status, typically through a show of wealth and power in one form or another. These practices are often referred to as 'magnificence', something that was seen as impressive and desirable. While these cultural traditions mostly persisted across the period, they shifted and adapted to changes in perceptions of what was fashionable.

Nobles' clothing, like that of all members of society, was expected to identify their status; if nobles did not dress as such, they might well cause others to doubt their status. The nobility therefore typically dressed extravagantly, in expensive fabrics or furs, with jewellery and so on, and according to fashion. Indeed, various states passed laws specifically to restrict certain expensive and high-status furs or fabrics (velvet, silk, satin and the like) to certain ranks of society, although these regulations were seldom enforced very thoroughly (the extremely high price of such fabrics was more effective in this regard). Noblemen also very often wore swords, to demonstrate their martial status. Both noblemen and noblewomen rode fine horses, and increasingly used expensive horse-drawn carriages.

Houses were equally important: they were expected to be large and impressive, to accommodate many servants and to enable the nobility to practise hospitality. Definitions of exactly what made these buildings impressive changed over the period. As late as the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, noble houses were still being built to be at least semi-defensible. This helped to assert the military power of the nobility, as well as accommodating their retinues of armed men and servants. The practice continued in parts of Europe where warfare was frequent, but increasingly nobles built houses appropriate for a more peaceful society. These were intended to be comfortable places to live, fashionable and tasteful, with elaborate and expensive furniture and artworks. Paintings of one's ancestors were particularly favoured, as they simultaneously demonstrated one's wealth, lineage and taste. Crucially, however, houses were also intended to be statements of the owner's wealth, status and importance. They were supposed to impress inferiors such as tenants, equals such as other members of the nobility

– and superiors such as the monarch him- or herself, especially if it was thought that they might visit the house.

Nobles also pursued pastimes appropriate to their wealth and status. Two favourites were hunting in a variety of forms (mainly hawking or shooting deer or birds; foxhunting became popular later in the period) and jousting, both of which were linked with the military aspect of nobility (see Figure 7.6). Gaming and gambling were popular too.



Figure 7.6 Alexandre François Desportes, *Study for the Wolf Hunt*, c.1720, oil on board, 27 x 39 cm. Musée National de Céramique, Sèvres, France. Photo: Agostini Picture Library/Bridgeman Images. Hunting was an immensely popular noble pastime. It provided exercise, practice in horsemanship and use of weapons, a source of prized meat such as venison, and above all an occasion for sociability among social equals.

During the early modern period it was increasingly seen as desirable for nobles to have attributes that might be regarded as more ‘civilised’: eloquence, good manners, knowledge of literature and the arts, the ability to dance, play music and write poetry. Growing stress was placed on refinement and politeness. This began with education: nobles tended to be much better educated than the majority of people. By the early modern period almost all noblemen were literate, and more and more noblewomen were educated too, at a time when most people were not. Increasingly, noblemen also spent some time at a university during their youth. Later in life, nobles often took to spending at least

part of the year in towns, especially national and royal capital cities. Here they absorbed new developments in culture and the arts, and often became patrons of the arts, not least in order to adorn their houses and bodies. They participated in, and even dominated, European cultural and intellectual life.

Nobles therefore formed a sector of society which was distinguished from others through a range of criteria: title, privilege, lineage, possession and defence of honour, dress, housing, manners. Despite their variation in wealth, power and status, all were nobles of one kind or another. Their shared nobility was in large part intangible – imaginary, in fact. It lay in the mind and the eyes of the beholder more than in empirical reality. Yet it was a status which nobles worked extremely hard to achieve and defend. Any noble who did not follow the rules might well be regarded as not a noble at all.

Online session 7.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 7.1. This should take around 2 hours.

7.6 Nobles in society

Nobles in the local community

The nobility, therefore, were a distinct section of society, defined by elaborate rules, albeit rules which had some degree of flexibility. We now need to look at some of the roles that the nobility occupied in early modern society. Their possession of wealth and prestigious social status meant that nobles played a highly important role in shaping and governing their communities. They were recognised as powerful and they could use this power in a great variety of ways, to benefit wider society as well as themselves.

This power began at the level of the village. Since they tended to be the largest landholders in most villages, nobles had a considerable amount of say in the economic life there. In England, for example, noble and gentry landlords often practised enclosure, a process of reshaping the local landscape and economy to maximise their income: they changed field boundaries on their land in order to allow more productive agricultural techniques, such as sheep rearing rather than growing grain. These were decisions which frequently had serious consequences for tenants, as typically far fewer employees were required, but they were profitable for landlords and overall resulted in increased production and trade, for example in wool. But sometimes landlords' interventions were more helpful. Gilles de Gouberville, for instance, had the leisure to experiment with agricultural techniques in apple growing or in fertilising the ground.

Landlords in eastern Europe were even more proactive. In areas such as Prussia, Poland and Hungary, nobles carried out major reorganisations of their land and sought to tie their peasants ever more closely to it, introducing what is known as neo-serfdom, a return to the practice of unfree labour. This enabled nobles to increase their output of grain for sale on the market. The practice resulted in greatly increased profits, but much worse conditions for the peasants, who had little ability to resist attacks on their liberty and conditions (Wiesner-Hanks, 2013, pp. 213–15). In summary, then, nobles could use their control of the land to reorganise local agriculture in order to maximise production and profit.

Just as nobles dominated the agricultural life and decision making of village communities, they tended to dominate much of the government

and political decision making too. They might do this in one of two ways, either formally or informally.

On the formal level, we find that in many parts of Europe nobles were not restricted to economic control over their lands: they had the power to administer the law, to exercise what is known as seigneurial jurisdiction. This was a form of governmental devolution which had been especially common in the Middle Ages, when the power of central governments was weaker. In effect, the landowning nobles, as the most effective local powers, were made responsible for maintaining order and justice in their spheres of influence, something which they had a clear interest in doing anyway.

The strength of these jurisdictions varied across Europe. In England they were in decline, as they were mostly dismantled during the sixteenth century for all but the most minor and local matters. Elsewhere in Europe they remained, however, and in Spain they even increased, as the weak and indebted central government handed over control to the nobles (Dewald, 1996, pp. 69–70). The seventh Duke of Medina Sidonia, for example, had over 50,000 people within his *señoríos* (which in English would be known as lordships). Because they lived under the duke's jurisdiction, these people were referred to as his vassals. Within these areas, 'the Duke was responsible for the provision of local government, the administration of justice, and the maintenance of the militia, which included the collection of taxes needed to support these functions' (Pierson, 1989, p. 3). Elsewhere in Spain, in the province of Salamanca, 63 per cent of the land and 60 per cent of the population lived under noble jurisdiction. The dukes of Infantado, heads of the Mendoza family, controlled 800 towns and villages, had 90,000 vassals and appointed 500 officials; the duke 'ruled his estates in Guadalajara like a powerful princeling' (Lynch, 1991, p. 17). 'Some of the noble holdings were virtually independent states, huge concentrations of territory where the only writ recognised was that of the lord' (Kamen, 2005, p. 164). This pattern was also common in southern Italy. In such areas, therefore, the noble's control over the village was very intense, and he was a much more visible presence than the government. In many ways, the nobles *were* the government.

Even where this was not the case, nobles and gentry tended to dominate village communities more informally. Again Gouberville provides a useful example here, as he was an active leader within his village, for instance overseeing the process of dividing up its tax liability. He very often adjudicated on minor disputes between local

people, using his accepted social status to impose agreement on lesser people (Teall, 1978, p. 5). He was ‘a sort of local, even tribal chieftain. He settled disputes and dispensed justice on a small scale’ and even administered medicine to his villagers. He also of course exploited that power for himself, lording it over the local clergy: ‘If one of his dogs was stolen, he took steps to have the thief excommunicated from the pulpit of the parish church’ (Le Roy Ladurie, 1987, pp. 204, 214). Gouberville had no technical legal right to exercise these functions: he was not mayor or governor. As the wealthiest and most prestigious man around, however, he was simply deferred to.

Roles in government and public life

In early modern Europe, therefore, social and economic power tended to overlap with political power, and one reinforced the other. It was expected that a noble would be not only wealthy but also powerful within society. For this reason, most European rulers made use of nobles to help run the localities. Nobles were usually keen to do so, both because it was honourable to serve the monarch and the community, and also because it added to their practical power. This association of political power and noble status was also why many royal officials in France received automatic elevation to the nobility. In England they served as justices of the peace (JPs), lord lieutenants, sheriffs and so on. Naturally, this reflected the hierarchy of nobles, with the nobility serving in higher positions such as lord lieutenants, while JPs were usually drawn from the gentry. In Spain the seventh Duke of Medina Sidonia held important office as Captain General of Andalusia and Captain General of the Ocean Sea. He was the leading figure in the defence of the south-western coast and raised troops for the king’s armies; as late as 1641 he had 41 cannons in his own castle. His power was so effective in his region that when at the last minute King Philip II (1527–1598, reigned 1556–1598) needed a powerful figure to lead his great Armada against England in 1588, he settled on Medina Sidonia. Similarly, at a much more modest level, Gilles de Gouberville had a minor office as lieutenant of waters and forests in his part of Normandy.

In Germany the nobles’ rule over the provinces was particularly strong, so much so that they in effect became sovereigns themselves, while central government virtually withered away and the state became a loose confederation. As in other places, the power of individual nobles

varied greatly, from the greatest, such as the dukes of Bavaria, who ruled a state larger than Wales, down to the many imperial knights whose 'states' might comprise nothing more than a small castle and a few villages.

The question of power in the regions therefore offers another point of contrast between the nobility in different European states. In this case, the difference arose largely because of the relative power of the state in each country. In Germany the central state was weak, so the nobles were able to expand their own independent power, whereas in England, for example, a relatively strong central government was able to keep the nobility more closely under control.

Nobles in wider society

Just as nobles, as landowners, played crucial roles in economic and political decision making at the village level, more important nobles played similar roles on the wider stage. Nobles' power, wealth and prestige meant that they were automatically seen as having roles to play in public life, as natural leaders, and noblemen's desire to win honour drove them into seeking these roles.

Warfare was the longest-established and most honourable noble pursuit (see Figure 7.7). As you have seen, in the medieval conception of society nobles were seen as 'those who fight': they protected the people and the state as a whole, and thereby justified their privileges. One Danish nobleman, Herluf Trolle (1516–1565), articulated this belief very explicitly when called away to fight in 1565. Despite being advised not to go, he insisted, saying:

'Do you know why we are called noble lords [*herremænd*], why we wear gold chains, have earthly goods and wish to stand above the others and be held in higher esteem? It is because it is our privilege, when our king and ruler, country and realm should need us, to fend off the enemies of the land, to protect our fathers' realm with all power and fortune so that our subjects may live in peace and tranquility: for life is at once sweet and bitter and the one shall not be had without the other.'

(Quoted in Netterstrøm, 2014, p. 122)



Figure 7.7 Designed by Lambert de Hondt and woven by Jucocus de Vos in Brussels, Belgium, *Siege of Bouchain, 13 September 1711*, eighteenth century, tapestry. Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, UK. Photo: Blenheim Palace/Bridgeman Images. John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, commissioned this tapestry (one of a set of 11) to help commemorate his success as a commander in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14): success which earned him his dukedom.

Trolle did indeed go to fight, and was killed. As individuals whose social status commanded deference and respect from their social inferiors, nobles were automatic choices as military commanders, and most of the great generals of the period were of noble birth. It is striking, for example, that the **parliamentarian** side in the **English civil wars** (1642–49), which later abolished the House of Lords,

initially relied on the Earl of Manchester (1602–1671) and the Earl of Essex (1591–1646) to lead its army.

Nobles also served on the national political stage. Almost all early modern European states had some form of parliament in which the nobility automatically had representation; the House of Lords at Westminster in London is one surviving example. Typically, the nobles' house or chamber was the most powerful. Here, nobles were involved in advising the ruler and helping to guide the welfare of the state as a whole by making new laws (see Figure 7.8). They played a similar role at the royal court: surrounding the monarch, advising him or her, and serving in royal government.

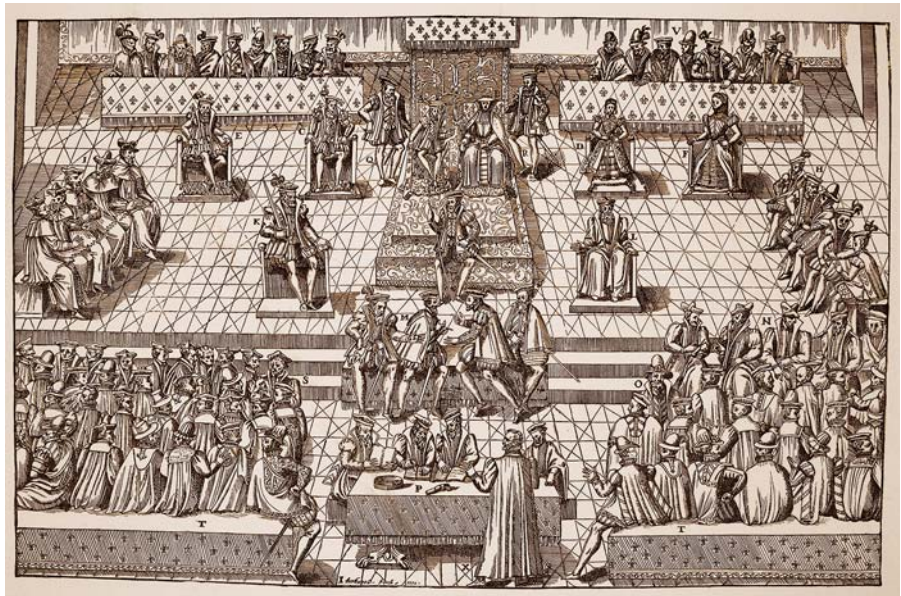


Figure 7.8 Jacques Tortorel, *The States General at Orléans*, 1560, engraving. Photo: Private Collection/The Stapleton Collection/Bridgeman Images. The French Estates General (*États généraux*), like other representative assemblies, contained representatives of the nobility (V) as well as the clergy (S) and the commoners (T).

Exercise 7.3

Now turn to Stéphane van Damme and Janet Dickinson, 'Courts and centres' in the set book and skim-read pages 288–97. Although this chapter looks at the court mainly from the perspective of monarchs and governments, it also discusses the role of nobles.

After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- Why did nobles want to attend court?
- Why did rulers want nobles to attend court?

This should take around 40 minutes.

Discussion

- Nobles were attracted to the court by the desire to be close to the ruler and benefit from close association with them. They could gain tangible rewards from royal favour or holding office at court and, as van Damme and Dickinson suggest, participate in a dialogue with the monarch.
 - Rulers were keen for nobles to attend their court for several reasons. The presence of nobles and their participation in courtly ritual enhanced the glamour and impressiveness of the court, and increased the perception that the court and the monarch were the centre of political power within the state. Encouraging nobles to attend and serve at court also gave rulers a means of control over the nobles, who might otherwise threaten royal power.
-

Paradoxically, given the nobles' role as natural political leaders, they often took leading roles in rebellions against state authority too; even rebels from the lower classes frequently sought noblemen to lead them. Similarly, nobles often played a key role in changes of religion, when their support would give both legitimacy and practical support to these changes.

Nobles were thus active at both central and local levels and they provided a bridge between the two, acting as mediators or brokers between centre and locality. The role of the patronage system, referred to in the chapter by van Damme and Dickinson which you read in exercise 7.3, was crucial here. This was a form of social relationship that existed between powerful people such as nobles (the patrons) and

those lower in the social hierarchy (the clients). Because nobles were powerful, lesser people sought to stay on good terms with them and aimed to attach themselves as their followers, offering their loyalty and support for a noble's activities, whether military, political or merely social. Clients thereby gained protection and potential reward from their patrons. The patronage system operated in many spheres and at many levels, and many patrons were themselves clients of people further up the ladder. In this way the system helped to build bonds between different levels of society, stretching from the royal court (or other power centres such as the papacy) right down to towns and villages across Europe.

Gilles de Gouberville provides a good example of a patron from the lower levels of the nobility. His noble status enabled him to intercede with higher authorities to procure minor favours for his friends and neighbours, such as obtaining tax relief for a poor, blind widow (Teall, 1978, p. 5). Gouberville was a very minor royal official but, as Elizabeth Teall has commented, 'his contribution to local stability really derived from his position as seigneur, from his multitudinous family connections, and from his familiarity and rapport with his neighbors. A royal appointment simply added another sort of authority' (Teall, 1978, p. 8).

These fairly informal social relationships between greater and lesser men can be seen as forms of corruption, not unlike nepotism, but they helped to provide the social glue that kept society reasonably ordered. For example, having clients helped nobles be effective military commanders or local officials, because their clients followed them not because they were the monarch's generals or ministers, but because they followed the individual noble concerned.

In the 1650s, in the wake of the monarchy's defeat in the English civil wars, the Duke of Newcastle (1592–1676) gave some advice to the future Charles II (1630–1685, reigned 1660–1685) about how he believed the nobility and gentry played roles in governing society, as you will see in the next exercise.

Exercise 7.4

Turn to Reading 7.3, Newcastle's description of the patronage system, 1994, located at the end of the chapter. This is an extract from the Duke of Newcastle's advice to the future Charles II. (The language and spelling are quite tricky, so don't worry if you find it puzzling in places.)

After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- What was the social and political relationship between the great noble Shrewsbury and the gentlemen Booth and Corbett?
- How did this relationship contribute to stability in wider society?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

- Newcastle shows that the relationship between Shrewsbury and his followers was reciprocal. On a social level, Booth and Corbett publicly acknowledged their loyalty to Shrewsbury by wearing his colours (the blue coat), and in return he invited them to dine with him. They did his business in the rural areas where he had interests, such as Cheshire and Shropshire, and he did them favours in London by acting as their 'solister [solicitor]' (meaning someone who got things done for them, rather than a lawyer) at the law courts and the royal court.
 - Newcastle goes on to suggest that this relationship contributed to wider political stability by being replicated across England. He implies that the king could get his business done in the localities through the intervention of local nobles.
-

In Reading 7.3 you can see that although Booth and Corbett were both very wealthy men, Newcastle suggests they were wise to submit to the social hierarchy and that they gained from it. Newcastle's view was perhaps somewhat idealised, since this system did not always work perfectly. What, for example, if great nobles clashed in their wishes, as they often did? Yet Newcastle was right that often the system *was* effective and helped the monarch to maintain order and stability in a period when the state's power was still limited.

7.7 Continuity and change

A final point to consider is the question of continuity and change. On the whole this chapter has emphasised continuity in the condition and role of the nobility over the early modern period. Other historians, however, have stressed the changes that took place. You can explore this question in an online exercise on the question of continuity and change in the political and economic spheres.

Online session 7.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 7.2. This should take around 45 minutes.

The nobility remained a highly important element of society throughout the period covered by this module. They certainly lost some of their independent freedom of action in relation to the state, but they retained great power in all sorts of ways. As always, historians need to weigh up elements of continuity against elements of change when assessing the overall fortunes of the nobility. Which was the dominant note? There is of course no definitive answer to this – it is a matter of interpretation.

Economically, the nobility remained very strong. They retained a powerful position in terms of landownership, increasing involvement in industry and so on. There may have been some adjustment in the share of the wealth held by different sections of the nobility: in some areas the upper nobility grew in wealth at the expense of the lower; in others, the position was reversed. But the landed elite, with their claims to nobility, remained dominant across most of Europe. Although in many ways they can be seen as parasitic in that they consumed wealth and produce without creating it, they did play important roles in managing and developing the economy and helping to run society.

Of course the continuity of the nobility as a whole did not prevent individual nobles and noble families failing because of new pressures or problems, but others rose to fill their places and quickly sought to appear indistinguishable from those they had supplanted. The ideas of nobility persisted with remarkable durability and flexibility, and this was

perhaps key to the nobility's survival and success. Culturally, nobles continued to be the sector of society which outsiders aspired to join, and which largely dictated fashion and taste.

Conclusion

Nobles had pre-eminence in almost all spheres of early modern society. They were the richest, the most prestigious and the most powerful group. It is crucial to recognise that these aspects all interlinked and overlapped. They possessed political power because of their economic and social power. All three acted together, and therefore none of these three forms of power can be separated from each other.

Nobility and noble identity were of course social constructs, a set of imagined rules, in spite of what you have read about noble blood and so on. In many ways you can argue that they were simply convenient fictions, designed to justify and defend the highly privileged position of a tiny number of individuals who controlled a massively disproportionate amount of the wealth and power within early modern society. Nevertheless, the nobility were in practical terms a reality, and their ethos and ideas about themselves and about wider society were a crucial, if not necessarily a very welcome, aspect of early modern European society.

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Readings

Reading 7.1 A set of short extracts from early modern commentators

Sources: Details of the source information can be found alongside each individual extract. Full source details are available in the references section.

John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester (1427–1470): ‘Noblesse resteth in blood and riches’ (quoted in Skinner, 1987, p. 136).

Thomas Smith (1513–1577), *De Republica Anglorum*:

We in England divide our men commonly into foure sortes, gentlemen, citizens, yeomen artificers, and laborers. Of gentlemen, the first and chiefe are the king, the prince, dukes, marquises, earles, vicountes, barrons, and these are called ... the nobility, and all these are called Lords and noblemen: next to these be knightes, esquiers and simple gentlemen. ... Dukes, marquises, erles, vicountes, and barrons, either be created by the prince or come to that honor by being the eldest sonnes, as highest and next in succession to their parentes.

(Smith, [1583] 1906, p. 31)

Stefano Guazzo (1530–1593): ‘In so far as we are born of good lineage, we are the best’ (quoted in Kamen, 2000, p. 70).

Charles Loyseau (1564–1627), *A Treatise on Orders*:

[In France] we have ... that nobility which derives from ancient blood, and that which derives from dignities. The first has no beginning, the second has a beginning; the first is original, the second acquired. We tend to call the latter *nobility* and the former *generosity* or *gentility*.

(Quoted in Baker, 1987, pp. 21–2)

William Segar (c.1564–1633), *The Booke of Honor and Armes*: ‘The true nobilitie of men, is *Vertue*, and that he is trulie noble that is vertuous, bee he borne of high or of lowe Parents’ (Segar, 1590, p. 34).

Reading 7.2 William Harrison, ‘Of degrees of people in the commonwealth of England’, 1587

Source: Harrison, W. (1587) *The Description of England: The Classic Contemporary Account of Tudor Social Life*, Edelen, G. (ed.), Washington DC, The Folger Shakespeare Library and New York, Dover Publications, Inc., pp. 113–4, (this edition 1994).

Gentlemen whose ancestors are not known to come in with William Duke of Normandy [...] do take their beginning in England after this manner in our times. Whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, whoso abideth in the university giving his mind to his book, or professeth physic and the liberal sciences, or, beside his service in the room of a captain in the wars or good counsel given at home, whereby his commonwealth is benefited, can live without manual labor, and thereto is able and will bear the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman, he shall for money have a coat and arms bestowed upon him by heralds (who in the charter of the same do of custom pretend antiquity and service and many gay things), and thereunto being made so good cheap, be called master, which is the title that men give to esquires and gentlemen, and reputed for a gentleman ever after. Which is so much the less to be disallowed of for that the prince doth lose nothing by it.

[p.114]

Reading 7.3 Newcastle's description of the patronage system

Source: Quoted in Heal, F. and Holmes, C. (1994) *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, pp. 190, 192.

In my time, Gilbert, that great Earle of Shrewsbury whoe was a wise man, had a gentle soule, a Loyall, – at a St. Georges feaste, I have knowne Sir Georg booth a Cheshire knight And of six, or seaven thousand pound, a yeare, weare my Lord of Shrewsburys blew Coate, on St. Georges Day, – as also Sir Vinsent Corbett [...] [who] had 4 or 5000 a yeare, & hee wore my Lords blew Coate ... butt the nexte day they satt both at my Lords table nexte to him, & [...] they were very wise in itt, for thus they did oblige my Lord, to bee their servant all the yeare After, with his power to serve them, both in Courte and westminster Hall, & to bee their solister, – agen my Lord had no busines in the Country, but they did itt for him, – & then the King had an Easey busines, for what soever busines his Majestie had in any County In England [...] itt was but speaking to Shrewsbury, or Darby, & such great men, itt was Done, with Ease & subilety.

[p. 192]

Chapter 8 A sense of self: individualism

Ole Peter Grell

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand early modern individualism and its significance for cultural and social history
- understand the complexities of early modern autobiographical writings and how to interpret them
- consider and evaluate historical interpretations, and how they are constructed from early modern sources.

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century historians of the Renaissance and the Reformation began to claim that modern individualism, with its concept of independent, self-reliant individuals who had freedom of action, originated within these two major historical movements. The idea was first launched in 1860 when the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) published his ground-breaking *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Burckhardt concluded that one of the results of the Italian Renaissance was the creation of a modern, secular society in which individuals were free to act. Instead of the old medieval corporate and collective structures, individualism materialised. Burckhardt's thesis has remained relevant and is still vigorously discussed and questioned.

Later in the nineteenth century the German historian Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) made similar claims for the Reformation, which he argued helped pave the way for modernity because of its emphasis on the unmediated relationship between God and the individual believer, thereby enhancing the role of individualism or, in Dilthey's words, 'the autocracy of the believing person' (quoted in Dixon, 2012, p. 181). In other words the Reformation sparked the emergence of the independent believer, a modern type of Christian who approached his or her faith as an individual rather than as a member of the wider confessional community, as had been typical of medieval Catholicism. As the historian John Bossy, whose work you encountered in 'Popular Christianity and personal faith' (Chapter 2), puts it, because the Reformation was less focused on ritual and sacraments than text (especially the Bible), the 'right' belief became something which could be mastered by the individual rather than the church (Bossy, 1985, p. 102).

The Reformation, as you learned in Chapter 2, began with the evangelical principle of *sola scriptura*, referring believers directly to the Bible without any intermediaries, detaching salvation from the sacraments and the priestly interventions of medieval Catholicism. Even if this open and individualistic approach to faith and salvation among Protestants, underpinned by the idea of the priesthood of all believers, did not survive the dramatic and revolutionary years of the early Reformation of the 1520s, it retained considerable significance. Protestant authorities became increasingly dogmatic and authoritarian

during the sixteenth century, in the period historians have labelled the age of confessionalisation, but it remained the case that Protestantism more than Catholicism appealed to the individual and required personal judgement. This served to create a religious culture which encouraged fragmentation and placed the main religious responsibility on the individual (Greyerz, 2008, pp. 187–226).

Recently these two arguments for the greater significance of the individual as a consequence of either the Renaissance or the Reformation have come to be seen by some scholars as part of the same trend towards individualism (Martin, 2004). Both Burckhardt's and Dilthey's definitions of individualism were vague. Today most scholars assume that some degree of self-consciousness and reflection constitute a vitally important part of the individual. There is, however, little agreement among scholars about how this might be deduced from the sources of the past which historians seek to interpret. Scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt, one of the so-called New Historicists, reject the notion of the modern self or individual as a social construct. Instead they see what they term 'self-fashioning', dependent on specific social, religious and cultural factors, as determining individualism (Greenblatt, 1980).

8.1 Autobiographical writers

Historians consider the writing of diaries and autobiographies, which became increasingly common during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to be a product of this growing individualism which characterised Protestant areas in particular. Such documents have become increasingly important to historians interested in cultural and social history who see such sources as providing historical insight into lives and attitudes which cannot be found in public records or other official documents. They do, however, present the historian with some difficulties of interpretation, especially with regard to the relation between the individual's life and the text produced, which can be far from straightforward and needs careful handling (Graham et al., 1989, p. 17). You will need to be aware that such diaries and autobiographies had very different intended audiences, which has influenced the way historians have used them. Some were written purely for personal use or for only very limited circulation among close friends and relatives, as was the case with Alice Thornton's *Book of Remembrances*, while others were aimed at much wider audiences, as with Nehemiah Wallington's notebooks (you encountered both of these in Chapter 2), or they might even have been intended for publication.

In this chapter you will encounter three very different 'selves' or identities: different both in terms of their social and cultural position and in terms of the sources providing evidence for them. We begin with Lady Anne Clifford and her carefully constructed statements or self-fashioning for posterity, consisting of both textual and pictorial evidence, then we continue with the diary of an unknown German soldier from the Thirty Years' War, and finally we conclude with the story of the stolen identity of a French sixteenth-century peasant, Martin Guerre, based on two contemporary accounts of the court case against the imposter.

8.2 Lady Anne Clifford

One of the most remarkable diaries of the early modern period is that of Lady Anne Clifford (1590–1676), Countess of Dorset, Pembroke and Montgomery (see Figure 8.1). It is one of only a few diaries written by early seventeenth-century women. Anne was born into the upper echelons of the English aristocracy. Her parents were George Clifford, third Earl of Cumberland (1558–1605) and Margaret Russell (1560–1616), daughter of the Earl of Bedford. George was an important courtier in the reign of Elizabeth I (1533–1603, reigned 1558–1603), while Margaret was a highly educated Protestant, who showed considerable care in Anne's education. She first employed a governess, Anne Taylor, and in 1601 she hired the poet and historian Samuel Daniel (1562–1619) as a tutor for her daughter. Anne was brought up an only child, her two brothers having died in infancy, and she saw little of her father, who spent most of his time at court and eventually left her mother for his mistress some years before his death in 1605.

In his will Clifford left his entire estate to his brother Francis, excluding only his wife Margaret's **jointure** and a marriage portion of £15,000 for Anne to be paid on her marriage. The will would appear to have come as a surprise and disappointment to his estranged wife and daughter. Encouraged by her mother, with whom she lived, Anne contested the will on the basis that the properties belonging to the barony of Clifford were inheritable by sole female issue. The case continued beyond Margaret's death in 1616 and was carried on by Anne, with her first husband's ambiguous support, until King James (1566–1625, reigned 1567–1625 as James VI of Scotland and 1603–1625 as James I of England, Wales and Ireland) finally settled the matter with the King's Award in March 1617. The king found Anne's claims to the Clifford lands in Westmorland and Skipton were valid, but also accepted the conditions of the will. It was decided that Anne and her husband should receive compensation from her uncle: a total of £20,000, of which £3,000 would be paid only if and when Anne accepted the award, which she never did. It was, however, stipulated that if her uncle had no male heirs the land would revert to Anne.

Anne had married Richard Sackville (1589–1624), the third Earl of Dorset, in 1609. He proved a gambler and a spendthrift, popular with King James and constantly engaged in sporting and betting ventures.



Figure 8.1 Robert White, Anne, Countess of Pembroke (Lady Anne Clifford), aged 13, mid- to late seventeenth century, engraving, 28 x 17 cm. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG D28103. Photo: © National Portrait Gallery, London.

For an arranged, dynastic marriage it proved remarkably loving, disrupted only by money problems and disagreement over Anne's claims to what she saw as her rightful inheritance, not to mention her dislike of 'my Lord's Favourite', Mathew Caldicott, with whom her husband might well have had a homosexual relationship. The couple had five children: three sons who died in infancy, and two daughters, Margaret (born in 1614) and Isabella (born in 1622). They lived at Knole House in Kent, residing in Dorset House when in London. Sackville died suddenly in 1624 when only 34 years old, leaving his estate to his brother Edward, whom Anne considered her enemy. His death, however, left Anne with a substantial jointure comprising several income-generating properties. Despite deciding not to marry again after she had contracted smallpox following her husband's death, Anne surprised her family and friends by marrying six years later. Her second husband was Philip Herbert (1584–1650), fourth Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery. She may have decided to marry Herbert because of his position as a privy councillor and Lord Chamberlain, which she considered useful in her quest for the restitution of the Clifford lands. They had two sons, both prematurely born, who died shortly after birth. The couple eventually separated after four and a half years of marriage and Anne took up residence at Baynard's Castle, near London, where she remained until the end of the civil wars.

In 1643 Anne finally inherited the Westmorland and Skipton estates when her cousin Henry Clifford died only two years after his father Francis had passed away. Six years later, in 1649, Anne settled permanently in her northern estates, where she would remain until she died in 1676 (Acheson, 1995, pp. 1–14; see Figure 8.2).

Anne Clifford left two autobiographical statements for posterity, one textual and one pictorial. The first consists of an assortment of diaries, memorials and chronicles, while the second concerns the large painting or triptych, known as the 'Great Picture', which she commissioned in 1646. The diaries were written partly for herself and for her immediate family as an explanation and justification of her actions. What has survived of the diaries has come down to us in copies from the eighteenth century.



Figure 8.2 After Sir Peter Lely, *Anne, Countess of Pembroke* (Lady Anne Clifford) in her late eighties, c.1646, oil on canvas, 76 x 63 cm. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 402. Photo: © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Exercise 8.1

Turn to Reading 8.1, The Diary of Anne Clifford, 1616, located at the end of the chapter. After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- Using the information given above, and the diary entry, how would you describe Anne's relationship with her mother?
- Why was her mother's place of burial so important to Anne?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

- Anne was very close to her mother, with whom she had spent all her childhood and youth until her marriage in 1609. She and her mother had been united in their pursuit of what they considered Anne's rightful inheritance of the Westmorland and Skipton estates. Anne was deeply worried by the report she received on 13 May informing her of her mother's serious illness and prayed for her survival. The subsequent report of her mother's death a fortnight later had a devastating effect on her and she considered it the greatest loss she could have endured.
 - The significance of her mother's burial place should be seen in the context of Anne's attempt to regain the estates of Westmorland and Skipton. Her claim to these lands could be seen as weakened if her mother was interred with members of her birth family at their church of Alnwick, rather than within the Clifford domain. Anne also considered it a bad omen for her attempt to regain her inheritance if her mother was not interred in Skipton. She was clearly relieved when two days later it emerged that her mother had left it for her to decide where she should be buried, and she immediately started to plan the building of a small chapel for her mother.
-

With her mother's death in 1616 Anne must have been concerned whether she could continue the fight for her inheritance on her own. It would appear that her mother had first asked to be buried next to her brother Francis, rather than on Clifford land. However, a codicil to Margaret's will offered Anne the choice of where to bury her and she was buried within the Clifford estates in St Lawrence's Church in Appleby. Anne never built a chapel for her mother as she planned, but

instead erected a funeral monument or sarcophagus for her the following year, most likely designed by one of the finest sculptors of the day, Maximilian Colt (White, 2009, pp. 45–8; see Figure 8.3).

Exercise 8.2

Turn to Reading 8.2, *The Diary of Anne Clifford, 1617*, located at the end of the chapter. To what extent did the issues around Anne's claim to the Westmorland and Skipton estates affect her relationship with her husband?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

In the period immediately after the King's Award, which had been accepted and signed by her husband in March 1617, issues relating to Anne's claim continued to strain their relationship. The earl was keen on getting his hands on the remaining £3,000 of the compensation granted by the award, which depended on Anne signing up to it. After having urged her to sign on the 16th and been told that she would never agree, not least because of her promise to her mother, the earl informed her the following day that he accepted her view and intended to let the matter rest. However, he appears to have been unable to do that for more than a day. Accordingly, nothing happened on Good Friday, which was spent on Bible reading and preparations for taking communion on Easter Sunday. But on the 19th the earl once again failed to persuade Anne to sign the award. The subsequent 'great falling out' the next day, on Easter Sunday after the whole household had taken communion, was undoubtedly a consequence of the disagreement the previous day.

Even for a well-educated woman belonging to the top echelon of the aristocracy, Lady Anne Clifford's stance and refusal to give up what she considered her entitlement in terms of inheritance was unusual in the early seventeenth century. Inspired by her mother, Anne was prepared to hold out against some of the leading men of the day, be they family, members of the ruling elite (including the Archbishop of Canterbury), or even King James himself. She was under continued and considerable pressure in a patriarchal society where fathers, husbands, clergy and the king were in control, but despite that she was prepared to stand up for what she considered her right.



Figure 8.3 Attributed to Maximilian Colt, tomb of Margaret, Countess of Cumberland (Lady Anne Clifford's mother), 1617, St Lawrence's Church, Appleby, Cumbria, UK. Commissioned by Lady Anne Clifford. Photo: © Historic England.

Her husband had been prepared to support her case only in order to obtain financial compensation which would help his cash flow. That Anne refused to sign the King's Award, thereby depriving him of the last £3,000 of the settlement, clearly riled him and he tried his hardest to get her to sign. It would appear from the diary that when the earl returned to the issue for the second time the day before Easter he referred to the need to be in 'perfect charity' at Easter, thereby adding a religious argument as a reason for Anne to give in and sign the award. She clearly rejected this as a valid argument and the matter remained unresolved the following day, when the couple fell out badly over the issue.

8.3 The Great Picture



Figure 8.4 Attributed to Jan van Belcamp, *The Great Picture (Triptych)*, 1646, oil on canvas, centre panel 254 x 254 cm, side panels 254 x 119 cm. Commissioned by Lady Anne Clifford. Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria, UK. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

Anne Clifford commissioned the ‘Great Picture’, also known as the ‘Great Triptych’ (because of its three panels), in 1646 (see Figure 8.4). By then it was five years since her uncle Francis Clifford, fourth Earl of Cumberland, who had inherited the Westmorland and Skipton estates which she considered hers, had died, and three years since her cousin Henry Clifford had passed away without issue. In other words, she had by then inherited the estates she had so tenaciously fought for since she was 15 years old. However, due to the civil wars Anne (a **Royalist**) was unable to travel north and take possession of her estates until 1649. Instead, she remained in London where she had been living in Baynard’s Castle since October 1642.

Anne had two copies made of the large triptych she designed – both 18 feet wide and 9 feet high (approximately 5.5 by 2.75 metres) – one for Appleby Castle and one for Skipton Castle, the two main residences in her estates of Westmorland and Skipton. Only the Appleby version has survived. The pictures were intended to impress the people who viewed them, projecting an image of Anne’s power and ancestry. This is clearly a case of self-fashioning. The triptych is a unique, self-conscious proclamation of the status and importance of an aristocratic woman who was prepared to assert her rights and privileges within a patriarchal society.

The triptych is dominated by six large full-length figures, plus a number of smaller portraits decorating the interior walls behind them. In each of the three sections of the triptych several books can be seen, with their titles clearly shown. The picture also contains a number of documents, shields and scrolls, all covered in dense writing. While the figures in the triptych are all of considerable size, intended to impress and create respect, these texts are all in small characters that are virtually impossible to read unless the observer is very close to the canvas.

The large central panel of the triptych depicts Anne's parents, George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland and Margaret Russell, Countess of Cumberland, and her two older brothers, Robert and Francis, who both died in childhood (indicated by the fact they are wearing skirts, as boys did in accordance with contemporary custom until they turned seven years old). On the walls behind them hang pictures of four women. These are Anne's aunts. The two hanging over Margaret's head are portraits of her sisters, Anne Russell, Countess of Warwick (1548/49–1604) and Elizabeth Russell, Countess of Bath (1558–1605), while the two hanging over the heads of the boys are Anne's father's sisters, Frances Clifford, Lady Wharton (1556–1592) and Margaret Clifford, Countess of Derby (1540–1596). From the inscription on the scroll/shield held by Anne's brother Francis we learn that all the characters depicted have been copied from paintings made of them in 1589 and that Lady Margaret is shown as pregnant with Anne. No one looking at this panel could be in doubt that Anne belonged to one of the most powerful aristocratic families in Britain.

From the inscription in the left-hand panel we are told that the date here is 1605, the year Anne's father died and failed to leave her the Westmorland and Skipton estates, as both she and her mother expected. A girl of 15 in 1605, Anne is depicted in the panel with various objects appropriate to her interests, position and gender: a book of music, a lute, a piece of embroidery, a comb, and an hourglass to remind the viewer of time passing. This panel also contains a couple of portraits placed on the wall behind her: pictures of her governess, Anne Taylor, and her tutor, Samuel Daniel, who taught her for three years from when she was eleven years old. Both these portraits are accompanied by short biographical inserts.

In the right-hand panel Anne is portrayed as the mature lady she had become by 1646, when she commissioned the triptych. Although by then she had not yet been widowed for the second time, she is dressed

rather severely in black. A letter on the table next to her informs us that the marriage of her younger daughter Isabella had taken place on 5 July 1647 and leaves space for further information to be added at later dates (Hearn, 2009, pp. 2–24). This tells us that the painter (or, more likely, group of painters) involved in the production of the triptych spent over a year on the job. Anne is shown here with only a dog and a cat for company, and on the wall behind her are portraits of her two husbands, Richard Sackville and Philip Herbert, with coats of arms and brief biographies added.

Thus Anne makes an appearance in all three sections of the triptych: in the womb of her mother in the centre panel (1589), as a teenager in the left-hand panel, and finally in the right-hand panel at the age of 56 when she at last inherited the Westmorland and Skipton estates.

All three sections of the triptych contain a wealth of books with their titles easily identifiable. No less than 50 works are included. The Great Picture is in fact unique for the period in terms of the abundance of books it displays: rather than depicting just one or two books to indicate the piety, wealth or learning of the person portrayed, the triptych presents what amounts to a pictorial record of Anne's whole library. Furthermore, traditionally only men were portrayed touching or handling books, while women tended not to make physical contact with the books displayed. Similarly, open books, or books in use, were normally painted only when depicting men; women were conventionally portrayed with closed books. The triptych emphasises Anne's learning and her fondness for reading. The collection shown in the left-hand panel along with the young Anne is diverse and has been labelled a miniature library of the English Renaissance with a distinctly contemporary touch; it includes many works which were published for the first time in Anne's lifetime (Acheson, 2007, pp. 211–13; Hackel, 2009, pp. 99–108).

Exercise 8.3

Examine the image of the Great Picture/Triptych (Figure 8.4) and then answer the following questions:

- Why do you think that Lady Anne Clifford commissioned this?
- Why do you think she chose the depictions in the triptych?

A copy of the image is also available on the module website, where you can zoom in and see more details.

This should take around 25 minutes.

Discussion

- Three years after she had finally inherited her estates, Anne was still unable to leave London because of the civil wars, so commissioning the triptych may well have been her way of dealing with the frustration of being unable to take physical possession of her inheritance. By having the Great Picture painted she was able to further underpin her dynastic claims to the estates and to demonstrate to her tenants and dependants in Westmorland and Skipton that she was their rightful mistress.
 - This is a carefully planned picture, produced to support Anne's dynastic rights and claims. Its three parts represent significant moments in her life. In the central panel her parents and dynastic connections (especially her female connections) are emphasised, while we are informed that she has already been conceived. In the left-hand panel we see Anne at 15 years of age, when her father died and his will deprived her of the estates she felt entitled to (in other words, the year when the battle for her rights commenced). In the right-hand panel Anne is portrayed as she looked after she finally succeeded to her estates in 1643.
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As pointed out by Karen Hearn, Anne intended her triptych to serve a number of purposes. It is principally a memorial to her success, despite the odds stacked against her. It also emphasises particular moments in Anne's life and the significance of particular people to her. Note that it focuses on her past and that no portraits of her daughters or grandchildren are included. The picture acts as a defence and validation of Anne's extended battle for her inheritance. It is also a deliberate

proclamation of aristocratic female rights and strength in an otherwise patriarchal world (Hearn, 2009, p. 24).

It is noteworthy that the triptych is dominated by the large female figures of Anne and her mother. In the central panel her father is pushed to the right and her departed brothers to the left, while her mother takes centre stage. Other males, such as Anne's husbands, are shown only in smaller portraits within the Great Picture. The triptych is, in other words, a memorial to two forceful, well-educated and proud aristocratic ladies who were prepared to stand their ground.

8.4 The diary of an unknown German soldier from the Thirty Years' War

Information about what ordinary men and women thought and did in the early modern period is extremely difficult to find, mostly because these people did not have the skills and education to leave any written evidence, and also because they simply did not have the time to write down their views and opinions. This is true of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), the first major war in history to be widely commented on and interpreted by contemporaries. However, a wealth of pamphlets and newsletters dealing with the war and its consequences were published in a number of languages across northern Europe from the 1620s onwards.

Exercise 8.4

To get some background information about early modern warfare and the Thirty Years' War, turn to Humfrey Butters and Henry J. Cohn, 'Dynastic politics, religious conflict and reason of state, c. 1500–1650' in the set book and read the section 'The Thirty Years' War' on pages 270–4. Then read Jonathan Davies, 'The impact of war' on pages 308–14.

This should take around 20 minutes.

There is no discussion for this exercise.

A considerable number of diaries describing the Thirty Years' War and its consequences were produced by contemporaries who were either directly involved in the conflict or experienced its effects on their communities. Some of these diaries were written with publication in mind, while others remained in manuscript form and saw only limited circulation. What characterises most, if not all, of these diaries is that they, like others of the period, were primarily produced by members of the upper echelons of society, in other words officers and ministers (Peters, 1993, pp. 9–11).

An exception is the diary of an anonymous German soldier who served in the imperial army, which the historian Jan Peters discovered in an archive in Berlin around 1990. From the handwriting, content

and style of the diary, Peters concludes that the soldier was educated in a Latin school. The diary appears to have been based on notes taken by the soldier during his service and covers the years 1625–48. From 1647 to 1649, while permanently garrisoned in Memmingen in Germany, the soldier took the opportunity to produce a clear copy of his diary – probably for his own use and that of his son, who was attending a nearby school in Altheim (Figures 8.5 and 8.6).

Using the diary (which unfortunately appears to have lost a few pages) and the names of people and places provided in it, and comparing the information with local church registers in places where they have survived the war, Peters is able to suggest a possible name for the author of the diary, namely Peter Hagendorf. Furthermore, from the author's language Peters thinks it is likely that he originated from the (Catholic) Rhineland area, while his interests in mills and their technical aspects indicates that he was the son of a miller. This would help explain why the diarist had been able to attend a Latin school, as millers generally belonged to the upper levels of the rural community (Peters, 1993, pp. 11–26).



Figure 8.5 Copy, after Jaques de Gheyn, 'Pikeman', number 4 in the series *Wappenhandelinge van Roers, Musquetten ende Spiessen* ('The handling of pipes, muskets and spears'), 1607, engraving. Photo: akg-images.



Figure 8.6 Jaques de Gheyn, 'Musketeer', number 12 in the series *Wappenhandelinghe van Roers, Musquetten ende Spiessen* ('The handling of pipes, muskets and spears'), 1607, coloured engraving. Photo: akg-images.

The diary's author demonstrated his technical knowledge when he found himself besieged for a month in Fritzlar in Germany by the Swedish army led by General Johan Banner (1596–1641). Food proved in short supply and extremely expensive, and most of the imperial soldiers in the city had to make do with a diet of herbs and beans. The

diarist and his wife, however, fared considerably better, as they managed to get hold of a sack of threshed barley and rye. Together the couple built a mill from two grindstones and used the flour to bake bread, some of which they were able to sell at a considerable profit (Peters, 1993, pp. 166–7).

The diarist was present at some of the major battles and sieges of the Thirty Years' War and took part in the siege and subsequent sack of the imperial city of Magdeburg in May 1631. Magdeburg, a Protestant city, was the first ally of the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus (1594–1632, reigned 1611–1632), who had become the main champion of the Protestant cause in the Holy Roman Empire when it signed a treaty with Sweden in August 1630. However, despite repeated public pledges by Gustavus Adolphus that he would come to the assistance of his ally when it was besieged by Catholic imperial forces, the Swedish king failed to do so, and in 1631 Magdeburg was conquered by imperial forces commanded by Count Tilly (1559–1632). The city was sacked by Tilly's forces, who had endured heavy losses during the siege, and a significant part of its population was massacred. The total devastation of one of the empire's finest cities received wide publicity across Europe. For Protestants, the sack and destruction of Magdeburg represented an event of apocalyptic proportions (see Figure 8.7). It came to be seen as a disaster on a biblical scale, matched only by the destruction of Jerusalem itself (Cunningham and Grell, 2000, p. 175).

The author of the diary describes how his regiment marched from Paderborn, via Goslar, to Magdeburg and laid siege to the city for months before storming it on 20 May 1631. The siege proved a protracted affair, with considerable losses incurred by the besiegers (see Figure 8.8), who lost two commanding officers and had a third resign after only ten days' service (Peters, 1993, p. 138). By the time of the Magdeburg campaign our soldier had risen through the ranks via corporal to sergeant.

Online session 8.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 8.1. This should take around 25 minutes.



Figure 8.7 Anonymous engraving of *The Fall of Magdeburg*, broadsheet published in 1631. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Germany, 219.1 Quod. (25a). Photo: Herzog August Bibliothek.

The diarist was lucky to survive being shot twice during the storming of Magdeburg, and also fortunate in the medical assistance given to him by a barber-surgeon. As in the rest of his diary, in the extract that you read in online session 8.1 he describes this event in plain and unadorned language, simply stating that he needed his hands tied behind his back in order for the surgeon to remove the bullet in his shoulder with a chisel. His hands had to be tied to prevent him from reacting violently to the surgical procedure which, of course, would have been excruciatingly painful as it was conducted without the use of anaesthetics, which were not available then.

The fact that our diarist's wife and child travelled with him and his regiment and were present in the camp outside Magdeburg should not surprise us, as armies in early modern Europe included a considerable proportion of non-combatants. Soldiers were accompanied by prostitutes, mistresses, wives and children, servants, camp hawkers and **sutlers** (who sold provisions). Camp followers in the Spanish army of **Flanders** in the late sixteenth century appear to have constituted more

than half the force, of whom female followers formed at least 28 per cent (Cunningham and Grell, 2000, p. 103). The extract from the diary that you read suggests that some of these women, such as the diarist's wife, took a very active role in the military proceedings when needed. The diarist would not have received any part of the booty from the sack of Magdeburg if his wife had not shown a total disregard for her own safety and entered the burning city. He was obviously deeply worried for the safety of his wife when news of the collapsing buildings within the city reached him, even if he claimed that his concern was more for his sick child than himself.



Figure 8.8 Hans Sebald Beham, *Wounded Man in the Army's Train*, c.1530, woodcut. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Germany, St.N. 751c Kaps 1452. Photo: © Germanisches Nationalmuseum/Georg Janßen.

At times the diary reads like a travel guide describing the main sights, only to return to events which directly affected or caught the interest of the soldier who wrote it.

Exercise 8.5

Turn to Reading 8.3, *A Soldier's Life in the Thirty Years' War*, located at the end of the chapter. Does this provide some insight into the moral and religious views of the soldier?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

The extracts in Reading 8.3 are, like the rest of the diary, extremely factual. However, while the soldier simply describes the siege of Colmar during the harvest period (July 1635) and how his wife was shot while harvesting what little corn was left to collect around the town, his entry the previous May about the deaths of three soldiers during a thunderstorm at Löffingen is different. Drawing attention to the fact that the soldiers were killed by lightning while they were playing outside, he also informs us of their cursing and blaspheming, thereby providing us with his explanation for their deaths. Evidently our diarist did not approve of such behaviour.

By the time of the events described in Reading 8.3 the diarist had been a soldier for several years. After service in northern Italy he had returned to Germany, where in April 1627 he had, as a lance-corporal, joined a regiment headed by Count Gottfried Heinrich Pappenheim (1594–1632). The regiment was quartered in Baden, where just a month later he married his first wife, Anna Stadlerin from Traunstein in Bavaria. They can hardly have known each other for more than a few weeks and were able to spend only a month together before the diarist's regiment moved no less than 800 kilometres across Germany to lay siege to the city of Wolfenbüttel. The soldier was accompanied by Anna, who, however, fell ill and remained sick during the 18-week siege. While the regiment was resting in Altmark his wife recovered, but the soldier himself then fell ill. He had barely recovered before the regiment marched towards Stade, near Hamburg. Here Anna gave birth prematurely to a son, but the baby died shortly after birth. The diarist's only comment was: 'God give him a happy resurrection' (Peters, 1993, p. 136). In their relatively short marriage (Anna died in 1633; the diarist remarried in 1635) the couple had four children, who all died in infancy. In each case our soldier expressed the hope that God would grant them a happy resurrection. These are the only religious

expressions to be found in the diary, which strikes a modern reader as remarkably factual and unemotional. The lack of religious comments or views is striking. Bearing in mind the diarist's origin in the Catholic Rhineland, we can assume he had been given a Catholic upbringing. However, there is little in the diary that suggests any Catholic faith. The only evidence can be found when, following his first wife's death, the diarist makes an entry about her and their deceased children. Here he notes that their first child was not baptised, while the other three were all given the 'blessed Christian baptism' (Peters, 1993, p. 142). By noting the difference between them in this manner, the diarist was making clear his concern that his unbaptised son might remain suspended in limbo: the everlasting state between heaven and hell where, according to the teaching of the Catholic Church, unbaptised children remained after death.

8.5 The story and identity of Martin Guerre

Apart from so-called ‘ego documents’, such as autobiographies and diaries, there are other sources which provide historians of the early modern period with insight into individualism and concepts of selves or identities. These are mostly documents relating to court proceedings. However, such documents are often more complicated to work with than the ‘ego documents’. Typically, they have been taken down by someone other than the person or people in question, such as a scribe or secretary to a court, which adds a further layer of meaning that must be taken into account.

Martin Guerre (1524–?), a wealthy French peasant from the Languedoc region, achieved fame in the late sixteenth century by being the focus of a famous case of extraordinary imposture. He was born in the Basque town of Hendaye in Spain in 1524, but his family moved to the village of Artigat just across the border in south-western France when Guerre was three years old. Here, aged 14, he was married to a girl, Bertrande de Rols, who was a few years younger and came from a well-to-do local family. It was clearly an arranged marriage of interest to the families involved. The couple remained childless for nearly a decade before a son was born in 1548. Some months later Guerre abandoned his wife and child after having been accused of stealing grain from his father.

Eight years later, in 1556, a man claiming to be Martin Guerre appeared in Artigat. He convinced Guerre’s family and friends, including Bertrande, that he was Martin. This man then lived with Bertrande and her son for three years, fathering two children with her, until he was accused of impersonation. He was tried for this, locally at the court at Rieux and then at the *parlement* of Toulouse, eventually found to be an imposter named Arnaud du Tilh, and executed. But for a while, until the real Guerre suddenly turned up during the court case in Toulouse, the judges had been inclined to believe the imposter to be Martin Guerre (Davis, 1983).

It clearly was and is an amazing story of the most daring deception. Consequently, only a year after du Tilh’s execution two works about the case appeared. A small news pamphlet was published, first in Latin and then in French, by Guillaume Le Sueur, a civil lawyer who may

have been present in some minor legal capacity at the court in Toulouse during the case against du Tilh. Whatever his role, Le Sueur clearly saw the publicity potential of the case and its usefulness for himself, as an ambitious young lawyer who wanted to rise within the world of law and literature. A more substantive work about the incredible impersonation was written by Jean de Coras (1515–1572; see Figure 8.9), who had served as the recorder and one of the judges in du Tilh's trial. These works proved extremely popular and went through numerous editions. The case continued to fascinate writers from the sixteenth century onwards, starting with Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), the French philosopher famous for his autobiographical essays. It has provided the inspiration for novels, plays, musicals and films.

The cultural and social historian Natalie Zemon Davis served as a historical consultant for the film *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1982) starring Gérard Depardieu as Arnaud du Tilh. Working with the director and the actors simultaneously inspired and frustrated Davis, especially since the film departed from the historical record. She therefore embarked on the research which resulted in her book, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, in 1983. This book, extremely well written and with considerable popular appeal, proved hugely successful. It was widely praised in the popular press as an excellent addition to the film. It was also well reviewed in academic journals as a piece of imaginative and inspired cultural and social history. Until the publication in 1988 of Robert Finlay's article, 'The refashioning of Martin Guerre', Davis' book remained universally and uncritically praised as a sophisticated scholarly work with widespread appeal. It was seen as a study which remained 'faithful to academic standards while conveying all the colour and drama of a famous tale' (Finlay, 1988, p. 554).

It is important to bear in mind that very few primary sources from du Tilh's trials have survived. We have no direct testimonies from the trials, nor for that matter any diaries or letters referring to them. Instead we have to rely on two publications, Le Sueur's *Admiranda Historia de Pseudo Martino Tholosae Damnato* ('The wonderful story about the pseudo Martin condemned at Toulouse') and Coras' *Arrest Memorable du Parlement de Tolose, Contenant une histoire prodigieuse, de nostre temps* ('A memorable decision of the high court of Toulouse, containing a prodigious story of our time').



Figure 8.9 Jean de Coras in the late 1560s, a seventeenth-century copy by Bastet of a lost original. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris. Photo: BnF.

Coras' work is by far the more detailed of the two accounts, which correspond with each other, differing only in some minor points. It is clear from Coras' work that the accused and later convicted du Tilh had carried out an amazing deception.

Online session 8.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 8.2. This should take around 30 minutes.

Du Tilh was clearly an impressive imposter with an amazing memory for detail, as acknowledged by Coras, plus an ability to manipulate and convince people. Only after his conviction by the *parlement* of Toulouse did he finally confess to his deception. Thus he admitted that some years earlier when he returned from Picardy some close friends of Martin Guerre had taken him for Guerre. This had given him the idea of carrying out the imposture. If Guerre's close friends could mistake him for Martin he might easily be able to convince others. He therefore set out to obtain information about Guerre's estate, his wife and family from their friends and neighbours, at the same time seeking information about what Guerre's way of speaking, manners and interests had been. He then memorised this carefully and put it to good use after Bertrande accepted him as her missing husband. While with her he was able to learn much more and to confirm and amend what others had told him about Guerre and his family (Ringold, 1982, p. 102).

Arnaud du Tilh is the central character in both Coras' and Le Sueur's stories. In Davis' book, however, he has to share this position with his 'wife', Bertrande. Davis claims that her book was inspired by the often 'inadequate and perplexing evidence' which the story about Guerre generated, and that she wanted to explore 'the double game of the wife' and the significance of 'rural Protestantism' in particular (Davis, 1983, p. viii).

Let us examine 'the double game of the wife'. Davis has no doubt that Bertrande played a significant part in making the imposture possible.

Exercise 8.6

Turn to Reading 8.4, Natalie Davis, 'The invented marriage' located at the end of the chapter. What are Davis' main arguments for Bertrande's involvement in the deception?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

Davis admits that Bertrande may have been fooled initially by the imposter's cunning, but by the time they were physically close in the domestic environment she would have realised her mistake. She considers Bertrande to have been an 'obstinate and honorable' woman who was not easily fooled even by a clever charlatan like du Tilh. Thus by the time Bertrande had gone to bed with him, she would, according to Davis, have realised that du Tilh was not Martin Guerre. She must therefore have decided to play along with him in what would appear to have been a successful relationship.

In his article 'The refashioning of Martin Guerre', which appeared in 1988, the historian Robert Finlay has criticised Davis' interpretation.

Online session 8.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 8.3. This should take around 30 minutes.

In her response to Finlay's criticism, Davis spells out what sources she used for her book and what research method she deployed. Obviously her 'core sources' were the already mentioned works by Coras and Le Sueur. However, she supplemented them with sources about peasant activities and statements from the relevant village archives, along with evidence from court practice in Toulouse, not to mention information about the authors of her two core sources. She claims that she 'worked as a detective, assessing my sources and the rules for their composition, putting together clues from many places, establishing a

conjectural argument that made the best sense, the most plausible sense, of sixteenth-century evidence' (Davis, 1988, p. 575).

According to Davis, Bertrande de Rols as an abandoned wife not only had the most at stake in the acceptance of Arnaud du Tilh as her husband, but also had early and intimate evidence that he might not be her husband. As Davis puts it:

The degree of her conscious accommodation to them [the evidence] is hidden from us: one could imagine indirection at the start, not only with the man whom she allowed to be Martin Guerre but also with herself. But somewhere along the way – early or late – their collaboration had to have been openly planned.

(Davis, 1988, p. 576)

Davis then seeks to tackle Finlay's criticism of the focus given to Bertrande in her book and the role she attributed to her in du Tilh's imposture. Davis denies that she relied solely on one argument to prove Bertrande's involvement in the deception, namely her sexual and bodily realisation that du Tilh was not her husband, as claimed by Finlay. Instead she points out that her interpretation rested on no fewer than four arguments derived from Coras and Le Sueur. The first is centred around the fact that du Tilh knew everyone by name and something of their past. The second is based on the fact that du Tilh differed from Martin Guerre in terms of body size. The third relates to Bertrande's behaviour from the time du Tilh was accused by Pierre Guerre, Martin's uncle, of being an imposter until she herself became a plaintiff against him. The fourth rests on the nature of Bertrande's testimony during the trial in Toulouse, which Davis claims made it possible for du Tilh to persuade the court that he was Guerre (Davis, 1988, p. 576).

In the next 11 pages of her article Davis provides a detailed historical reconstruction and argument around her four points and their importance as proof of Bertrande's involvement in the impersonation.

Online session 8.4

Now go to the module website and complete online session 8.4. This should take around an hour.

In terms of history, there is a major issue at stake in the historiographic debate between Davis and Finlay: namely, how far can historians go in their use and interpretation of their sources? To what extent should historians stick closely to the evidence available in the sources and refrain from being driven by hypotheses? It is often a balance difficult to achieve, especially when the sources are limited. The story about the return of Martin Guerre as reconstructed by Davis giving a central part to Bertrande du Rols may well be plausible. It is certainly well told and imaginatively constructed, but, in my opinion, lacks the necessary empirical evidence. Without such evidence the important borderline between history and fiction becomes blurred and it becomes impossible to separate historical reconstruction from invention.

Conclusion

In this chapter you have encountered three very different examples of selves and self-fashioning. Undoubtedly the most elaborate and comprehensive attempt at self-fashioning was that of Lady Anne Clifford. The fact that she was born into one of the most powerful aristocratic families of the day and was well educated goes a long way to explaining why this was possible. This would also have made it easier for her as a woman to stand up for what she considered her rights in a male-dominated, patriarchal society. Even so, her actions and the way she sought to justify them to contemporaries and posterity are remarkable for the early modern period. Anne would appear to have begun the justification of her actions, or self-fashioning, with her diary, parts of which have been preserved in eighteenth-century copies. The fact that we have several copies tells us that this work was circulated within the immediate family and not just intended as a private diary. Together with her mother, Anne may have started the elaborate dynastic memorials which were probably collated and constructed to be used as evidence in the attempt to claim the inheritance she thought she had been deprived of at her father's death. By the late 1640s an even more elaborate edifice of self-fashioning was created, in the form of the two triptychs. Not least due to the struggle and difficulties she encountered, Anne proved extremely careful in making sure that she was in control of the image of herself which she left behind.

The diary of the unknown soldier from the Thirty Years' War is a very different document and evidently intended only for the personal use of the author and perhaps his son. In terms of individuality and self it is much more difficult to interpret than Anne Clifford's diary. Only occasionally does the soldier's diary go beyond the purely descriptive, and it is perhaps most remarkable for its unemotional and detached approach and what it refrains from stating. Some sense of self is in evidence, but this materialises only when the text is closely read and interpreted. The concept of self-fashioning is difficult if not impossible to apply here, not least because the diary deals only rarely with personal actions and emotions.

The story and identity of Martin Guerre differ significantly from the other two examples in this chapter not only in terms of the sources, but also in terms of the heated historiographical debate it has caused.

The two early modern sources dealing with Guerre's story are in agreement and differ only in details. The book about the theft of Guerre's identity written by the historian Natalie Davis, who has worked extensively on the history of early modern France, proved tremendously popular, not least because of the film which preceded it. Ironically, Davis decided to write her book because the film differed from the historical record, only to find herself under attack for having departed from the historical sources and constructing a 'new' story in which she gave Guerre's wife a central role. She had, as the historian Robert Finlay has claimed with reference to the New Historicists, 'refashioned' the story about Martin Guerre. The historiographical debate between Davis and Finlay illustrates the difficulties early modern historians are confronted with, namely to what extent conjecture based on the often limited available sources can be accepted and used, and to what degree historians are obliged to flag them up clearly when doing so.

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Readings

Reading 8.1 The Diary of Anne Clifford, 1616

Source: Acheson, K. O. (1995) *The Diary of Anne Clifford 1616–1619*, New York, Garland Publishing Inc., pp. 49, 51–2.

May 1616

[p. 49]

Upon the 13th being monday my Ladys [her mother's] footman Thomas Petty brought me letters out of Westmorland by which I perceived how very sicke & full of greivous paine my dear Mother was so as she was not able to write herself to me, & most of her people about her fear'd she wou'd hardly recover this sickness[.] at night I went out and pray'd to God my only helper that she might not dye in this pitifull case[.]

[...]

[p. 51]

Upon the 29th Kendall came & brought me the heavy news of my mothers death, which I held as the greatest & most lamentable cross that could befall me. also he brought her Will along with him, wherein she appointed her body shou'd be buried in the Parish Church of Anwick [Alnwick in Northumberland] which was a double grief to me when I consider'd her body shou'd be carry'd away, & not be interred at Skipton, so I took that as a sign that I should be disinherited of the Inheritance of my forefathers. the same night I sent Hammon away with the Will to my Lord [her husband] who was then at Lewes[.]

Upon the 30th the Bishop of St Davids came to me in the morning to comfort me in these my afflictions, & in the afternoon I sent for Sir William Selby to speake to him about the Conveyance of my dear Mothers body into Northumberland & about the building of a little Chappel wherein I intended she shou'd be buried[.]

[p. 52]

Upon the 31st came M^r Amhurst from my Lord to me & brought me word that my Lord woud be here on Saturday: the same day M^r Jones brought me a letter from M^r Woolrich wherein it seem'd that it was my mothers pleasure her body shou'd be conveyed to what place I appointed & which was some contentment to my agrieved soul[.]

Reading 8.2 The Diary of Anne Clifford, 1617

Source: Acheson, K. O. (1995) *The Diary of Anne Clifford 1616–1619*, New York, Garland Publishing Inc., pp. 79–80.

April 1617

Upon the 16th my Lord [her husband] & I had much talk about these businesses [her inheritance and the King's Award] he urging me still to go to London & to sign & seal but I told him that my promise was so far passed to my mother & to all the world that I wou'd never do it whatsoever became of me & mine. Yet still I strived as much as I cou'd to settle a good opinion in him towards me.

Upon the 17th in the morning my Lord told me he was resolved never to move me more in these businesses because he saw how fully I was bent[.]

upon the 18th being Good friday, I spent most of the day in hearing Kate Burton read the Bible & a book of the Preparation to the Sacrament[.]

Upon the 19th I signd 33 letters with my own hand which I sent by him [Mr. Marsh] to the Tenants in Westmorland[.] the same night after supper my Lord & I had much talk of & perswaded me to yeild to these businesses, but I would not, & yet I told him I was in perfect Charity with the world. all this lent I eat flesh & observed no day but good friday. [p. 80]

about the 20th being Easter day my Lord & I & Tom Glemham & most of the folks received the Communion by M^r Ran yet in the afternoon my Lord & I had a great falling out, Mathew [Caldicott] continuing still to do me all the ill offices [harm] he cou'd to my Lord [.] all this time I wore my white satten gown & my white waistcoat[.]

Reading 8.3 *A Soldier's Life in the Thirty Years' War*

Source: Peters, J. (ed.) (1993) *Ein Söldnerleben im Dreissigjährigen Krieg: Eine Quelle zur Socialgeschichte* [*A Soldier's Life in the Thirty Years' War: A Source for Social History*], Berlin, Akademie Verlag, pp. 148–9, translated by Ole Peter Grell.

May 1635

To Löffingen. Here we had a terrible thunderstorm, despite that 3 soldiers played outside swearing and cursing terribly. Then they were all struck by lightning, 2 were stone-dead on the spot, the third survived for another 3 days before he died.

[p. 149]

July 1635

Once again back to Colmar. Here we camped in the field during the best harvest time. The people of Colmar had destroyed the neighbourhood around Colmar by cutting, reaping, riding and burning. We were constantly bombarded by canons from the city. There my wife was shot, because she and my boy were cutting [presumably what corn had been left in the field by the inhabitants of Colmar].

Reading 8.4 Natalie Davis, 'The invented marriage'

Source: Davis, N. (1983) *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, pp. 43–4.

What of Bertrande de Rols? Did she know that the new Martin was not the man who had abandoned her eight years before? Perhaps not at the very first, when he arrived with all his “signs” and proofs. But the obstinate and honorable Bertrande does not seem a woman so easily fooled, not even by a charmer like Pansette [Arnaud du Tilh]. By the time she had received him in her bed, she must have realized the difference; as any wife of Artigat would have agreed, there is no mistaking “the touch of the man on the woman.” Either by explicit or tacit agreement, she helped him become her husband. What Bertrande had with the new Martin was her dream come true, a man she could live with in peace and friendship (to cite sixteenth-century values) and in passion.

[p. 44]

It was an invented marriage, not arranged like her own of eighteen years earlier or contracted in a customary way like that of her mother and Pierre Guerre [Bertrande's widowed mother married Martin's uncle]. It started off with a lie but, as Bertrande described it later, they passed their time "like true married people, eating, drinking, and sleeping together". According to Le Sueur the "Pseudo-Martinus" lived with Bertrande "quietly, without strife, and conducted himself so well in every way with her that no one suspect any deceit." In the marriage bed of the beautiful Bertrande things now went well. Within three years, two daughters were born to them; one died, but the other, Bernarde, became Sanxi's little sister.

Glossary

aggregate population figures

the sets of population figures from different parishes of communities added together to give an overall figure.

almshouses

houses built to provide free accommodation for the poor.

apothecary

a person who prepared and sold medicines and drugs.

apprentices

boys or girls being trained in a set of skills by a master engaged in some form of manufacturing.

artisans

skilled workers (as opposed to unskilled labourers).

Capuchins

members of a religious order within the Catholic Church, who preached and took vows of poverty.

Catholic Church

the Christian Church, led by the Pope, or bishop of Rome, and with its headquarters in the Vatican.

conscription

the compulsory enrolment of persons for military or naval service.

Counter-Reformation

a reform movement within the Roman Catholic Church that arose in sixteenth-century Europe in response to the Protestant Reformation.

dogmatic

laying down principles as undeniably true, and beyond further debate.

Dominicans

an order of Catholic preaching friars, founded by St Dominic.

dowry

money or property transferred from the bride or bride's family to the bridegroom at the time of marriage.

edict

an official order or proclamation issued by a person in authority, such as a cleric, prince or member of government.

enclosure

the changing of the status of pieces of land, so that they passed from common or shared ownership into the hands of a single owner. This often involved physically enclosing or fencing off the area.

English civil wars

see entry for Wars of the three kingdoms

Enlightenment

a European intellectual movement of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasising reason and individualism rather than traditional sources of authority.

epidemic disease

an outbreak of disease affecting many people simultaneously.

exactions

demands for money or some other form of payment.

extended family

a family unit that includes other relatives such as grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, and uncles in addition to parents and children.

feudal system

a system of relationships based around the right to use land in return for labour or for services.

Flanders

an area now divided between Belgium, France and the Netherlands, but once a powerful state.

freeman

someone who has completed an apprenticeship and is freed from his bond to his master.

French Revolution

an uprising against the monarchy and ruling classes from 1789 to 1799 which resulted in the establishment of France as a republic.

Galenic

medical ideas or theories derived from the writings of Galen, a physician in classical Rome.

guilds

associations of merchants or artisans, to give members mutual support, control local trade and protect members' commercial interests.

historical demography

studies aimed at obtaining detailed information about the structure of populations and population changes by applying demographic methods to historical data.

homiletic tracts

texts teaching on a moral or religious topic.

humanist

a cultural movement during the Renaissance which turned away from traditional medieval forms of study based around texts, instead exploring ancient Greek and Roman thought.

humoral theory

a framework for understanding the human body which emphasised the role of fluids (or humours) in determining health and disease.

humours

fluids found within the body – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile – which determined if a person remained healthy or became ill.

imperial cities

cities and towns of the Holy Roman Empire that were subject only to the authority of the emperor.

indenture

a formal document which bound one person – such as a servant or apprentice – to serve another for a set number of years.

Industrial Revolution

the rapid development of industry from the late eighteenth century, through the introduction of machinery. It was characterised by the use of steam power, the growth of factories, and the mass production of manufactured goods.

Jesuits

members of the Society of Jesus, a religious order founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola, noted for their educational, missionary and charitable works, who played an important role in the Counter-Reformation.

jointure

a property settled on a woman at marriage, to be enjoyed after her husband's death.

journeymen

workers who had completed an apprenticeship. They were employed by masters, and had not yet set up their own workshops.

Latin

the language of the Roman Empire, it continued to be used by educated people throughout the medieval period and much of the early modern period in Europe.

lay

not part of the church.

life expectancy

the average period that a person can expect to live. As this includes large numbers of children who died young, it gives only a rough idea of how long an individual might survive.

Low Countries

the coastal region of North-West Europe comprising the modern Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, so called because much of the area was just above sea level.

menarche

the first occurrence of menstruation.

mendicant friars

monks who wandered across the country, preaching and asking for alms.

midwives

women who helped to deliver babies and supported mothers in the days following birth.

mortality

(or mortality rate) the number of deaths (or the proportion of deaths) in a given area or period, or from a particular cause.

nuclear family

a family consisting of two adults and their children.

nuptiality

the proportion of people within a population who are married.

oligarchy

a form of government where a small number of people hold power.

Orthodox Church

the Christian Churches originating in the Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire, not accepting the authority of the Pope of Rome, and using different forms of service to their western counterparts.

parish

a small administrative district of the Christian Church, usually with its own church and a priest or clergyman.

parliamentarian

a supporter of parliament (rather than the monarchy) during the English civil wars.

patriarchal

relating to a group or society where men have authority. This is often reflected in laws and customs.

patronage

various forms of support, protection, help in getting jobs, and other forms of aid offered by individuals to those lower down the social scale, thus creating networks of obligations

pauper

an individual in need of charity, especially one receiving a set pension.

physician

medical practitioners trained in medical theories (usually in universities) with skills and knowledge in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

piecework

employment in which a worker is paid a fixed rate for each unit (or piece) produced, performed regardless of how much time is taken.

polemicists

authors who put forward their own views on social, political or religious topics: they often criticised or attacked the opinions of others.

poor rates

local taxes used to fund poor relief.

poor relief

charity given to paupers by a parish or other official institution.

post-mortem

literally 'after death' – usually refers to an anatomical examination of the body to establish cause of death.

Presbyterian

a branch of the Protestant church, where congregations are ruled by a group of representatives or elders. The term is also used to describe members of these churches.

Protestant

a member of the Christian Churches that separated from the Roman Catholic Church at the Reformation. The term derives from a letter written by a number of German princes in 1529 protesting against a decree that condemned the teachings of Martin Luther.

proto-industrialisation

the large scale production of goods prior to the development of factory production in the Industrial Revolution, carried out in homes and workshops in rural areas.

purgatory

a place to which Roman Catholics believe that the spirits of dead people go and suffer for the evil acts that they did while they were alive, before they are able to go to heaven.

Puritan

a member of a group of English Protestants of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship within the Protestant church.

Reformation

a sixteenth-century movement aimed at the reform of abuses within the Roman Catholic Church which ending in the establishment of the Protestant Churches. The Reformation is usually thought of as beginning in 1517, when Martin Luther issued 95 theses criticising Church doctrine and practice.

Renaissance

a cultural movement, beginning in Italy, which saw a revival of interest in texts from classical Greece and Rome, resulting in a flowering of the arts and literature.

Royalist

a supporter of the King in the conflict with Parliament in the English civil wars.

sacramental theology

the understanding of the meaning of a group of rites within the Christian Church. The Catholic Church recognised seven, the Protestant Churches only two.

salvation

the saving of the soul from sin and its consequences.

Scientific Revolution

a series of developments in mathematics, physics, astronomy, biology, anatomy and chemistry during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which transformed views of society and nature.

secular

not connected with religious or spiritual matters.

seigneurial rights

from *seigneur*, French for 'lord'. This refers to essentially feudal legal rights held by nobles.

serfdom

the status of peasants who were required to provide labour and services to a landowner. Serfs were often unable to move away, or to marry without their landlord's permission.

service

employment as a servant. Some sort of 'domestic service' – working as a servant within someone's home – was a common form of employment for young women.

surgeon

a medical practitioner specialising in the treatment of wounds and conditions affecting the surface of the body.

sutler

someone who sells provisions to soldiers in camp or garrison.

theology

the study of the nature of God and religious belief.

Tridentine

relating to the Council of Trent. The term is usually used to refer to aspects of Catholic doctrine discussed at the Council.

urbanisation

the process by which an increasing proportion of the population move into towns and cities from rural areas.

vagrant

a wandering beggar, in contrast to one remaining in their home village or town.

vernacular

the language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people of a country or region.

Wars of the three kingdoms

a series of conflicts fought in the British Isles between 1639 and 1651 over forms of government and religious issues. These included the English civil wars and conflict in Scotland and Ireland.

wet-nurses

women who breast-fed other women's infants, usually in return for payment.

workhouse

house for the poor where inmates were forced to carry out some form of work in return for food and lodging.

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